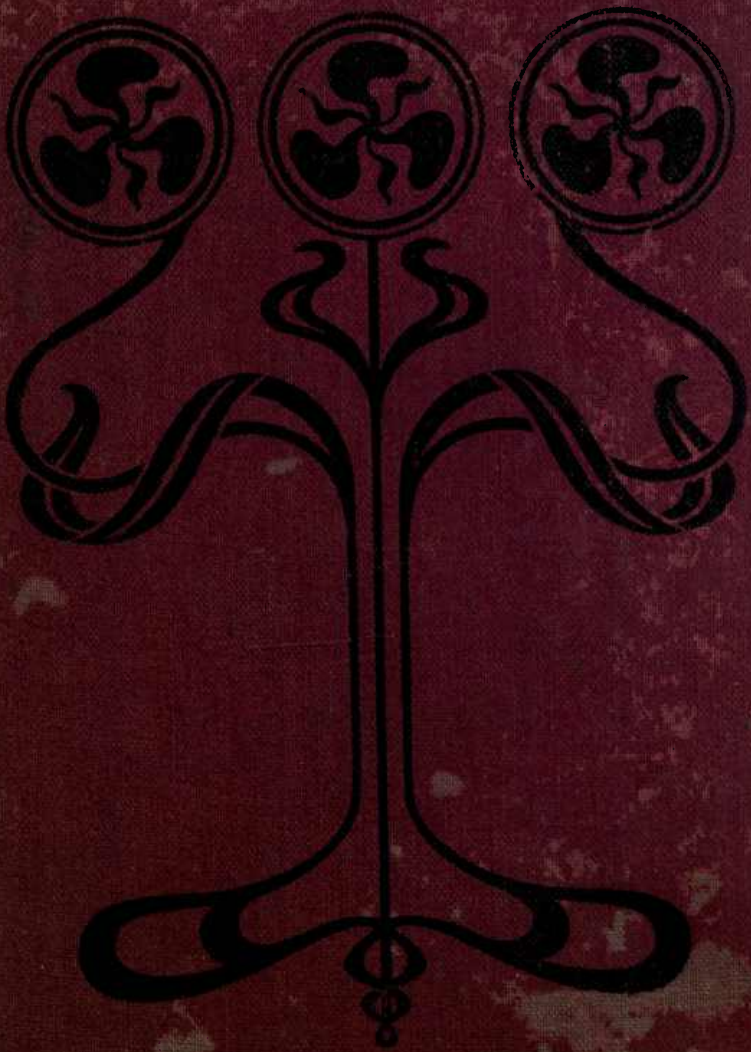
WEDDED AND PARTED



WEDDED AND PARTED

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "DORA THORNE"

E Brame, Mrs. Charlotte Mary

CHICAGO
W. B. CONKEY COMPANY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

IN UNIFORM STYLE

DORA THORNE
FROM GLOOM TO SUNLIGHT
HER MARTYRDOM
GOLDEN HEART
HER ONLY SIN
LADY DAMER'S SECRET
THE SQUIRE'S DARLING
HER MOTHER'S SIN
WIFE IN NAME ONLY
WEDDED AND PARTED
SHADOW OF A SIN

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WEDDED AND PARTED.

CHAPTER I.

THE Lady Ianthe Carre had always been considered one of the proudest girls in England. It was no new title; it had been given by her nurses in early years—by the fair, haughty mother who had not lived to keep her child's pride in check—by the old earl her father, who had boasted of it—by governesses and masters—by friends and companions—by every one, in short, with whom she came in contact.

It was Christmas Eve, and, if ever Lady Ianthe felt tempted to be proud, it was on this evening, when she stood in her magnificent dressing-room with her jewels and rich dress all ready for use. It did not occur to her that a feeling of pride hardly accorded with the season which should be marked by peace, good will, and sweetest humility—when, if ever, lessons of meekness and gentleness were to be learned. Nothing of this occurred to Lady Ianthe. Her artistic mind did homage to the beauty of the season. She had stood for an hour or more at the window watching the scene before her and admiring it. But that was all; the time and season brought her no higher thoughts.

It was very lovely, the scene upon which she gazed,

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the darkening sky with its gleaming stars contrasting with the white earth. No snow had fallen, although those who were weather-wise said it was piled up behind the clouds; but there had been for some days a sharp, severe frost—a frost that made the earth shine and sparkle like silver network. The bare hedges and leafless trees glistened with it—icicles, like great diamonds, hung from the gates, from the eaves of the houses, from the square turrets of the Abbey. The roads were hard and firm—a northeast wind was blowing, cold, sharp, and keen. It bent the tall, bare trees, it shook the berries from the holly, it stirred the white flowers of the laurustinus, it tried to tear the mistletoe from the stout old oak, it raised its voice at times and wailed aloud.

From far away over the Lea Woods came the distant sound of the Christmas bells—from afar off came the distant booming of the waves: while the light of the stars grew brighter as the night wore on. Over all—over the distant sea, with its silvery waves and crested foam, over the broad stretch of woodlands, over the pretty town of Leahurst, over the sleeping woods, over the broad pleasure-grounds and the frozen lake—over the whole land brooded a deep calm, a sweet, holy silence.

With the eye of an artist and the soul of a poet, Lady Ianthe stood looking from the window of her dressing-room. Presently she turned from the darkening sky and the frost-silvered earth to the warm, cosey room, with its cheerful light and gay coloring. She went to the toilet-table, where the maid stood awaiting her—where, in fact, she had been standing for the last half-hour, not daring to disturb the reverie of her young mistress.

Lady Ianthe looked at her small jewelled watch. It was not late.

"I will give one look," she said to her maid, "just to see that all is order before I dress."

She opened the door of her room and smiled at the warmth, the fragrance, the beauty, that surrounded her. The broad stairs were covered with crimson cloth, which contrasted with the white statues to be seen on every landing, and with great stands of rare flowers that filled the house with their perfume, and Christmas evergreens arranged in rich profusion and with greatest taste. A marble Flora stood in a bower of holly—Clytie's beautiful head smiled from a background of mistletoe—the huge picture-frames had wreaths of shining laurel round them.

Lady Ianthe went down the broad staircase. The great entrance-hall was brilliantly lighted, and looked like a miniature forest of evergreens. She opened the door of the state dining-room, and saw at a glance that all was right; then she went to the drawing-room, and smiled again as a most magnificent scene broke upon her. The noble room, with its gorgeously painted ceiling, lighted by innumerable wax tapers that gleamed from among the evergreens like stars, the exquisite scent of rare exotics, the silvery spray of the tiny scented fountains, the rich glow of the Yule-log, the choice pictures and graceful statues—all made up a scene that was rarely equalled. Lady Ianthe smiled to herself. All was as it should be.

The stately old housekeeper, Mrs. Charles, met her in the hall, and with a profound bow advanced to speak to her.

"My lady," she said, "may I ask if you have seen his lordship lately?"

"Not since luncheon," replied Lady Ianthe.

"Because," continued the housekeeper, "I saw Lord Carre an hour since, and I thought he was looking exceedingly ill."

"Ill?" repeated Lady Ianthe. "Then why did you not come to me at once?"

Without waiting for the housekeeper's answer, she hastened up the broad staircase to her father's room. Mrs. Charles looked after her.

"She is beautiful and bonny," she said to herself; "but what they say of her is true—she is one of the proudest girls in England."

Lady Ianthe knocked gently at the door of her father's room.

"Come in!" called a weak, faint voice.

She entered quickly, and hastened to the drooping figure seated by the fire—an old man, with snow-white hair, a delicate, refined, aristocratic face, and eyes dimmed with years and cares. His trembling white hands were clasped tightly when she entered—was it the shining firelight, or were there traces of tears on the worn face? She knelt by his side, and clasped her arms around him.

"Dear father," she said, "they tell me you are looking ill. Do you feel so?"

The sweet musical voice soothed and charmed him. He looked at the beautiful, eager face.

"Ill, my darling—ill on Christmas Eve? When you

give your grand ball do you think I would pay you so poor a compliment?"

She looked wistfully into his face. It grew calmer and steadier under her gaze.

"You do not look ill," she said; "but there is something in the sound of your voice that I do not like. Are you keeping anything from me—any bad news, papa?"

"Bad news on Christmas Eve! You are joking, Ianthe. Who has frightened you? Who has told you that I am ill?"

"Mrs. Charles."

The earl interrupted her with a laugh.

"That is because I sent to the housekeeper's room for a strong cordial," he said. "You may be quite at ease about me, Ianthe; I am not ill. How do you like Lord Ravenscourt, my darling?"

"I like him very well, though I had not much time to spend with him," she replied, evasively.

"I shall be well pleased," observed the old earl, "if you approve of him, Ianthe; he is wealthy, and his is one of the oldest titles in England. I am ambitious for you, but I think that I should be content to see you Lady Ravenscourt."

The fair, stately head was raised in disdain.

"I am in no hurry to marry, papa; I shall never love any one in the wide world so well as I love you."

The thin hands trembled as they rested on the proud head.

"Still, my darling, it would comfort me; I should like to know, when I am called away, that I had left you

in safe hands. Try to like Lord Ravenscourt if you can, Ianthe. Now it is time for you to dress. You will wear the famous Carre diamonds to-night. It is your eighteenth birthday, and the Ladies Carre were always considered of age at eighteen."

Lady Ianthe smiled a grave, sweet smile that softened her face into startling loveliness.

"I came of age long ago, papa," she said; "I can hardly believe that I am but eighteen. I have been mistress of Croombe Abbey so long that I have forgotten what it was to be a child. You will be punctual, papa, for the dinner! No more dreaming over the fire! Shall I call Morgan?" She bent down and kissed his face. "I wish," she continued, laughingly, "that I could kiss every line and every wrinkle away from your face, papa, and make you quite young and handsome again. Remember, I am to be the first to wish you a happy Christmas. I shall come to show you the Carre diamonds; you will wait here for me."

In another minute she was gone. The old earl met her glance at the door with a smile, and then, when the door had closed, and he was alone, a look of almost ghastly fear came over his face.

"How shall I tell her?" he cried, wringing his hands. "How shall I live through the mockery and deceit? How bear to see her surrounded as she will be this evening—know the truth, and yet not tell her?"

His lips trembled, and he bowed his white head, as though the storms and tempests of life had been too many for him.

"Not to-night," he said—"she shall not know to-

night. She is so young and so happy, so beautiful and so proud, she shall have this one night of perfect happiness, and to-morrow I will tell her all."

Half consoled, half suspicious, Lady Ianthe had gone back to her dressing-room; she knew her father so well, she loved him so dearly, with such utter and entire devotion, that it was hard to deceive her.

"He does not look ill," she said; "but there was something strange in his voice—something I have never heard before."

The wind wailed mournfully round the house—moaned fitfully—and, despite the warmth of her luxurious room, Lady Ianthe shivered.

"The Carres have their faults," she said; "but they are not superstitious. What is this strange fancy that has come over me?"

She forgot the wind and her cold shudder of foreboding when she saw the costly diamonds, the family heirlooms, that became hers on that day. She put on the dress of pale rose-colored brocade with rich white lace. She was tall and slim—this proud daughter of a proud race—with a graceful figure of perfect symmetry, while sloping shoulders, a slender throat, hands and arms of exquisite shape and color; and her movements were all grace and harmony. She had a queenly bearing—a certain sweet and gracious dignity that never deserted her—and a face that had in it all the proud, bright beauty of the Carres—dark, proud eyes that seemed to look out with serene stateliness on the world, passionate, beautiful eyes that could express both love and scorn, straight clear brows—a faultless face, oval in contour, with the

most exquisite bloom, surmounted by masses of dark hair, which had a natural ripple.

Eighteen years old that day, the sole daughter of one of the noblest and most ancient families in England, beautiful as the fairest dream of artist or poet, accomplished, gifted, could any fate seem more happy than that awaiting Ianthe Carre? On this, her eighteenth birthday—Christmas Eve—she came of age, and, by her own special wish, the day was to be celebrated by a grand ball.

Much to the old earl's delight, he had received a letter from Lord Ravenscourt, saying that he should be in the neighborhood at Christmas, and how much pleasure it would give him to spend a day or two at Croombe Abbey—the answer to which was, of course, a cordial invitation for the birthday ball.

There were several other visitors in the house—Lord and Lady Morston, Sir Harry Tredegar—who was one of Lady Ianthe's most devoted admirers—Miss Belhoughton, the pretty blonde Alice Lowther—a pleasant party of guests, assembled to do honor to the beautiful Lady Ianthe, and to spend Christmas under the hospitable roof of Croombe Abbey.

Lady Ianthe had been busily engaged, for she was sole mistress of that magnificent mansion. She was a perfect and most gracious hostess—ladies of twice her age envied her tact and judgment on this Christmas Eve. She had found her powers fully taxed, but she had also found herself equal to the occasion. Still it was late when she had gone to her dressing-room; yet no one could have told that her toilet had been hurried—even her own ex-

quisite and fastidious taste was gratified. The pale rose brocade showed the white shoulders and graceful neck; the white rounded arms were clasped by a diamond bracelet; a necklace of the same costly jewels adorned the beautiful neck, diamonds shone in the masses of rich hair and in the shell-like ears.

Nevertheless, although she was one of the proudest girls in England, she thought more of the old earl's admiration when he should see her in her jewels than of her own pleasure in wearing them. She took the jewelled fan, the lace handkerchief, her bouquet of flowers, and went to his room, one of the brightest pictures of girlish loveliness and womanly grace ever seen. She laughed aloud—a low, sweet, musical laugh—that seemed to stir the old man's heart as she bowed before him, and then she raised her clear dark eyes to his.

"Do you admire me, papa?"

"You are the queen of fair women," he said; and, she having taken his arm, they went down the grand staircase together.

There was a slight murmur as they entered the drawing-room. Lady Ianthe had never looked so beautiful. Lord Ravenscourt hastened to meet and greet her.

It was easy enough to see then that her words were true—of all the world she loved her father the best. No lovers, no admirers, could draw her attention from him. Handsome young faces, admiring eyes sued in vain. Lord Ravenscourt would have given much for a *tête-à-tête* for a few minutes, in which to whisper his admiration; but he could not draw Lady Ianthe from the old earl's side.

The great gong sounded, and they all went to the dining-room where the grand Christmas banquet was spread —while Lady Ianthe did the honors with a winning, stately grace; and no one knew, while Christmas greetings and good wishes went around, how the earl was praying in his heart that the greatness of his anguish might not slay him—that he might have strength to endure a little longer, for his daughter's sake. No one knew how he looked at her with the calmness of deadly despair in his heart, the anguish of a mighty dread in his soul, asking himself, over and over again how he was to tell her.

Presently he raised his white head in wonder. What were they wishing him? "A merry Christmas and a happy New Year!" He thanked them, in his courteous, high-bred fashion. How could they know the terrible death-wound that Christmas Eve had brought him? "A happy New Year"—why, it would be the first year of his long life to dawn in darkness, gloom, and shame!

Then the long and magnificent banquet came to an end, and he went, with Lady Ianthe, to receive their fast-arriving guests. Before long the grand old walls of Croombe Abbey seemed to re-echo with mirth and amusement. The old earl saw that Lord Ravenscourt paid his daughter great attention; but he could not see that his beautiful Ianthe was more gracious to him than to others. Once she refused to join in the dance, but came, instead, and stood by his side. He looked at her —the light in her jewels was not so bright as the light in her eyes. Her dress of pale rich rose fell round her in graceful folds—her fan, made of the rich plumage of

some tropical bird, was opened, and held against her white breast—her lovely face was flushed with girlish happiness and delight.

"Ianthe," he said, quietly, "I think you are very happy."

She raised her radiant eyes to his.

"Happy, papa! That is a small word to express what I feel. I am wonderfully happy. I would not change places with any one in the wide world."

"I wonder," he said, "if you could tell me what makes you happy?"

She laughed, and the light gleamed in her jewels.

"I can give you a faint idea," she replied. "I am happy because I love you and have in you one of the dearest of fathers—my ideal gentleman. I am happy because I belong to a grand old race, on whose name there has never rested a stain, on whose shield there has been no blot, and because I am what all the Carres are, pleasant to see, because I am young, and my life, all full of bright possibilities, lies before me."

The least gleam of mischief came into her eyes, and she looked at him with a bright smile.

"I am happy too, because I am queen of myself and all that surrounds me—also because my heart is light and free. Are those reasons sufficient, papa?"

"More than enough," he replied; and then, as she went away, he asked himself how he was to take this sparkling cup of life from her lips—how he was to change her innocent gladness into deepest misery. From his lips came the prayer:

"Oh, Heaven help me to bear my sorrow, or save me from it!"

Once again he looked at his child as she stood where the light of a large chandelier fell full upon her; and he said to himself it would be easier—much easier—to place her in her coffin and kiss her dead face than to tell her what he had to tell. Yet it must be told, and the time was drawing very near.

The ball was over at last, and the guests wearied with pleasure, had driven home under the light of the Christmas moon; the lights had been extinguished—the mantle of darkness and silence had fallen over Croombe Abbey. Lady Ianthe slept, dreaming of jewels and flowers and sweet whispered words; but the earl paced to and fro—wringing his hands—with bitter sighs that ended in low broken wailing. He wandered with a light in his hand to the great picture gallery, and stood before the portrait of his dead father. He placed the taper on the ground, and looked up at the face so noble and so stern.

"What have I done with it," he cried, wringing his hands—"this fair inheritance—this spotless name—what have I done with it? I am the last of my race, but I have been the first to act dishonorably. It will be said that I was weak and easily tempted—that I could not distinguish rogues from honest men. They will brand my name as name has never been branded before. They will say, 'Maurice, the eleventh earl, left his family name ruined—left, in fact, less than nothing.' Yet I meant to add so much to the glory of my name. What have I done? Oh, Heaven, what have I done?"

It was pitiful to see the old man fall down before his

father's picture, burying his face in his hands, weeping aloud and praying Heaven to pardon him.

Then he rose. Christmas morning had broken; the light of the moon and the stars had given place to the early dawn; the sky was gray, the frost had deepened. He must not be found there by his servants; they would know soon enough what had happened. Let him save his credit while he could. He went back to his own room, carefully closing the door. The day had dawned —the day on which he had to tell her—to strike with his own hands all the brightness and light from his daughter's life. If he could but avert the blow! He knew that the worst of the evil must fall on his beautiful daughter; and how would she, one of the proudest girls in England, bear the blame?

It was easy to see that he came of a heroic race—a race whose sons had high hearts and noble souls, who knew nothing of the craven called fear—for, though he had spent the night in aimless wandering, in restless prayers, in bewildered grief and remorse, he was at his place on Christmas morning ready to welcome his visitors and wish them the joys of a season that had no joy for him.

CHAPTER II.

It was come at last, the hour in which the old earl must tell his daughter all—the hour in which he must rob the young life of its brightness and its hopes.

He chose the time when all the house was silent—midnight—when the visitors had gone to rest, and the servants had all retired. He should have her all to himself then, and he could soothe her first outbreak of sorrow. He had said to her:

"Ianthe, when the house is all silent to-night, will you come to the library? I want to see you—I want to talk to you."

She had answered him laughingly, not feeling in the least surprised. It was the day after her birthday; perhaps he had something to say to her regarding the family jewels or the arrangements for her coming of age. Never a doubt crossed her mind. She dismissed her maid, saying that she was not ready for her yet, and that she need not wait. Then she removed the jewels from her beautiful hair and her white neck, took off her costly evening dress, and put on a warm white wrapper. There was a smile on her lips as she made these preparations.

"Now I can talk at my ease," she said to herself.

She went down quietly to the library, wondering why her father had chosen this strange, weird hour of night—wondering why it was so urgent that he should shorten his rest and hers.

She had never known the sensation of fear, but she shuddered a little as she went down the great staircase. The taper that she carried seemed to throw such strange lights and shades; the evergreens on the walls seemed to nod as she passed by.

"A large house in the silence and gloom of night is not very cheerful," thought Lady Ianthe.

Then she opened the door, and saw the earl sitting by the fire. She placed the taper on the table and went up to him. She clasped her tender arms round his neck.

"This is quite mysterious, papa," she said—"this midnight meeting."

She started when she saw his white face and trembling lips.

"What is the matter, papa?" she cried. "You are ill, or you have bad news to tell me. Your face is changed. What is it?"

She knelt down by his side and laid her fair face on his hands.

"Tell me, papa—I am always your comforter—tell me what has gone wrong this bright, happy Christmastide."

She never forgot the pale, worn face that was bent over hers.

"It is to tell you all, Ianthe, that I asked you to come here; and many a criminal has faced his judge, many a traitor his king, many a coward his foe, with far less of fear than I have of facing you, my only child, because of what I have done."

She was all attention now. The smiles had died from her lips, the playfulness from her manner; her sweet, frank eyes, full of wonder, were looking at him, and he seemed to cower before the clear, bright glance.

"What you have done?" she echoed, slowly. "I do not know what that may be; but of one thing I am quite sure—you have done nothing unworthy of a Carre."

"Alas, alas!" moaned the old Earl, as he bowed his head.

"You shall not frighten me," she said. "I am sure of it. You may have mistaken a shadow for substance, a dream for reality; but you have done nothing unworthy of a Carre. You have the tender, sensitive conscience of a gentleman, and you are making much of a trifle. You have done nothing a gentleman should not do."

"Alas," he moaned, "when I began life I had grand, noble dreams—I meant to do what no Carre before me had ever done! How miserably I have failed only Heaven knows."

"You may say what you like, papa—you will never destroy my faith in you. I could sooner believe that the stars gave no light, that Heaven was unkind, that the sun was dark, than believe that you had done wrong. A Carre do wrong! Papa, you speak thoughtlessly!"

"Listen to me, Ianthe!" he cried. "If I could give my life to undo what I have done, I would give it cheerfully; if any pain, any suffering, any torture of mine could avail, I would bear it. Nothing is of any avail, and yet I meant and hoped that it would all be so different."

She was growing alarmed now. What evil idea possessed him? What guileless folly had he magnified into a wrong?

"Papa, will you tell me what it is? Do not tremble so. If you had done all the wrong in the world, it would make no difference to me—I should but love you all the more, all the better. If the whole world turned round upon you and accused you, I should uphold you. Remember how I love you."

She smoothed the white hair from the careworn brow; she kissed the deep lines that furrowed the thin face.

"My darling," she cried passionately, "if you knew how I love you! All the love that other girls divide between mothers, sisters, brothers, friends, I have given to you."

There was something pathetic in the girl's deep attachment to her father. Listening to her, one could have fancied her a mother talking to a child.

"Now tell me," she said. "I wish I could know it without, as telling will give you pain; but that cannot be."

A dreary, far-off look came into the old man's eyes; his thoughts seemed to have wandered. She recalled them by touching his forehead with her lips; he started as though she had roused him from sleep.

"I have been trying to think, Ianthe," he said, "how far I am guilty, but I cannot tell; my thoughts are in a tangle. For example, if a man be born with an overwhelming tendency to any one thing, how far is he culpable in yielding to it?"

"You cannot put such a question," replied Ianthe. "There is the limit of right and wrong; no strong tendency can excuse wrong-doing."

"I suppose not," said the old Earl, with a sigh. "Some men are born poets—they must write poetry; some are born artists—they must paint pictures. I was born a speculator—therefore I have been compelled to speculate."

But Lady Ianthe had been raised too far above the ordinary grooves of life to know how much the term

"speculator" may be made to convey. She repeated the word dreamily—it had no terrors for her.

"A speculator, papa? There is nothing dreadful in that, is there?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, "if a man is never content, never satisfied."

"But you," she said, wonderingly—"how could you be that?"

"I cannot tell you, child, when I was ever anything else. The first thing I did when I came into possession of my estates was to speculate. Sometimes I won largely; sometimes I lost. Winning or losing, the madness grew on me. Do you understand the kind of speculation I mean, Ianthe? Perhaps I should rather call it gambling—it is gambling after all; and the same fever fires the veins of speculator and gambler. One day through my agent, who turned out afterward to be a most unscrupulous rogue, I would purchase stock, hold it for a few days, and then by selling it realize some thousands of pounds; afterward I lost even more heavily than I had won. Fifteen years since," continued the old Earl, with a deep sigh, "I lost what was to me a terrible sum. To meet it I was compelled to mortgage Croombe Abbey; a continuous run of ill luck left me no other resource. Listen, Ianthe. That ten thousand pounds for which I mortgaged this fair house and broad domain was lent to me by John Culross, a wealthy manufacturer. You remember his son, Herman Culross?"

A smile of unutterable contempt curled the proud lip of Lady Ianthe, but she made no reply.

"That," he went on, "did not trouble me very much.

I might have saved the amount, but that I have always lived up to my income. I thought one good speculation would pay for all. Two years since I was grievously tempted, Ianthe. A new company was started. It was to be confined to a few, and great hopes were entertained of it. It was for the working of a silver mine in Mexico. My agent came to see me about it. He could think and talk of nothing save the enormous profits to be realized—the vast sums to be made. I was greedy—ah, Ianthe, how my greed has been punished! They told me that any one who could invest two hundred thousand pounds in that mine would soon be a millionaire. I read all the papers, I studied the figures, I thought long and anxiously about it. Then the love of greed and speculation mastered me. I went to London, and met several men of business. They all spoke highly of the mine. So I gathered all the money I could from every source—I mortgaged my income for the next three years—I raised the two hundred thousand pounds. After waiting impatiently for some return—for cheerful news—on Christmas-eve the blow fell. Then were realized my worst fears. The mine has proved a complete failure, and I am a ruined man—a ruined man," repeated the old Earl, with a terrible gesture of despair. "Maurice, Lord Carre is hopelessly ruined; he is the first Carre who has brought even the faintest shadow of disgrace on the name. Oh, Ianthe, have you any pity for me? Have you anything save contempt?"

"You did it for the best," she murmured.

"You have not heard all yet, Ianthe. Six months since they wrote to me—those men who have ruined me

—and asked for a further advance of five thousand pounds. It was needed, they said, for the further working of the mine; and after that the enormous profits would begin."

He stretched out his hands, as though he would avoid some terrible spectre.

"Before Heaven, Ianthe," he cried, huskily, "I have never seen the full extent of what I have done until now. Men might turn round and call me thief."

"No, it cannot be so bad as that, papa," she exclaimed. "Tell me all."

"I am your cousin Wyndham Carre's guardian, and he has a small fortune of five thousand pounds, which he left in my charge. It was invested in banking shares, and brought him in a small but certain income. When he was going to India, he said, laughingly, that he knew I had a good head for business, and that, if ever I saw a chance of turning his five per cent. into ten, I was to do it. When they wrote to me for this last five thousand pounds, thinking I was helping to make his fortune as well as treble my own, without awaiting his permission, I sent it; and it is all lost, Ianthe. Could any man be so mad, so foolish as I have been?"

"You must pay it back, papa," she said, cheerfully. "You did not intend to lose it."

"Pay it back!" he moaned. "I would to Heaven that I could! You do not realize what I mean, when I say that I am a ruined man. It means that I, Maurice Carre, Earl of Croombe, stand before you penniless. The home of my ancestors—this old Abbey, where the best and bravest of my race have lived and died—has

gone from me. My income is mortgaged—I have sold the Home Farm—I am as utterly ruined and without resource as a pauper within the work-house gates. Yet I could bear it all if it were possible to repay Wyndham Carre. I cannot live, Ianthe, to hear myself called thief."

She had grown very pale as she listened.

"No man can say that, dear. You frighten yourself with a shadow. Wyndham told you to do better with his money, if you could."

"And I have lost it. Ianthe, what answer shall I make to him if he comes to me and says, 'Where is my all, the fortune I left in your hands?'"

"Could I not sell my jewels? And the pictures—surely they would be worth more even than five thousand pounds?"

"The jewels are not worth one-half the sum, and the pictures—do you not understand, Ianthe?—the house as it stands, have gone from me. I am destitute, penniless. Was there ever a sorrow like unto mine?"

"And this is Christmas," said the girl, thoughtfully, "when every one is supposed to be so happy? Papa, what shall we do?"

"I cannot tell. I dare not think. I am a ruined man. Do you realize all that that means for you, Ianthe—you, brought up in the midst of luxury, accustomed to carriages, horses, servants, to dress as you liked, to do as you liked? What will become of you, my darling? When we two walk out of here hand in hand, there will be no home for us to go to; we shall not have one shill-

ing in the wide world. Now do you realize what ruin means?"

She grew even whiter, and looked at him with great startled eyes.

"Are matters so bad, papa?"

He tore his hands from her grasp, and, with a passionate cry, fell on his knees before her.

"Can you ever forgive me, Ianthe? I would die to win your pardon. I have ruined your bright young life —you, the fairest, the brightest of my race. You will have to work for your daily bread? Can you ever forgive me?"

She bent over him with sweet, patient tenderness.

"Papa do not speak to me in that fashion. You have done all for the best. I should have nothing to forgive, even if you had done the deadliest wrong. I am your child—it is not for me to judge you. Let me help you —comfort you—but do not ask me for pardon. I am willing to suffer with you."

"Yesterday," said the old Earl, in his trembling voice, "when the letter came to tell me that the mine was a failure, there came also a letter from John Culross —that is, from his executors—he himself—the man who lent me the money—is dead. They are calling in all the moneys due to him; they have asked for the ten thousand pounds. They have given me formal notice for its repayment; if in three months it is not paid, I shall lose Croombe Abbey—it will pass from my hands into theirs."

"Three months," she repeated—to her it seemed like a reprieve. "Surely much can be done in three months —you can borrow the money from someone else, papa?"

"Who would lend ten thousand pounds to a ruined man? Of course I shall send for a lawyer, and do my best; but I know it will be useless. Croombe Abbey, the home of the Carres, will become the property of a manufacturer. It is enough to make the dead Carres rise from their graves."

Her beautiful face flushed hotly—her eyes flashed fire.

"Papa," she said, "there is one thing we must do at once—we must tell the truth to Lord Ravenscourt. You think he is here because he admires me; he must know that I am no longer a rich heiress. We shall see if that makes any difference to him. Then we must, under some pretext or other, send away our visitors. How sorry I am that we wasted money on that foolish ball!"

"You were happy, my darling—so that it was not all waste," said the Earl. "Tell me, Ianthe, do you love Lord Ravenscourt?"

"No, papa; I like him—in time perhaps I might love him."

"It would take half the bitterness away if I could see you married," he remarked; "it is for you I dread the change, not for myself."

"We must tell him to-morrow, papa," said Lady Ianthe. "See, it is striking two, and you look so tired, dear. I will not stay to listen to any more; I know the worst. We will bear it together—we shall always be together; and I am so young, so strong, so brave, I can help you so much. Promise me you will try to sleep."

He looked gratefully at her.

"There is one thing more Ianthe. The letter calling in the mortgage is from the son, Herman Culross, and

he speaks of coming over to see me about it. You will be civil to him for my sake, if he comes, Ianthe?"

"Civil? Certainly, papa. I was never guilty of incivility to an inferior—I consider it ill-breeding."

"He is heir to a millionaire now, Ianthe—hardly an inferior."

"If he had the wealth of the whole world, papa," she said, haughtily, "he would still be inferior even to a ruined and penniless Carre."

The old Earl looked kindly at her for one minute, as she stood with all the pride of her race expressed in her face.

"I will be civil, dear, for your sake; but I must not forget that he, this manufacturer's son, was presumptuous once. I am afraid that I shall be prouder even in my poverty than I was in prosperity."

All the haughtiness died away as she bent down once more to kiss him and say good-night; and then she went away, leaving him alone.

Lady Ianthe went back to her room, to think over what she had heard. Ruined, penniless, disgraced—she who had been reputed heiress of a grand old house—she who had known nothing but luxury and magnificence! It was all over; she might bid farewell to the pleasure and gayeties she had enjoyed. There were no more triumphs for her, no more jewels, no marvels of costly dress, no crowds of admiring suitors—it was all ended. There was but one thing for her to do; and that was to go away with her father where they might hide themselves from the gaze of all whom they had ever known. That was all that remained for her; and she was one of

the fairest girls in England—just eighteen. Still she had the courage of the Carres. She shed no idle tears, she made no complaint. She smiled bitterly to herself as she thought of Lord Ravenscourt. She understood now her father's desire that she should like him.

"I may be thankful that I did not," she thought —"that his sweet words and compliments have won no love from me; for, unless I mistake—and mistake greatly—when he understands the real state of things, he will say all that is kind by way of condolence, and then ride away."

It was her first lesson in the trying realities of life, and, considering how spoiled and indulged she had been, it was a terribly hard one.

On the morrow Lord Carre gave some slight intimation of the state of affairs to his noble guest, who was most profuse in his expressions of sympathy. The next morning he announced that business would call him away at once.

As she watched him drive off, Lady Ianthe smiled bitterly to herself.

"Let me take that lesson to heart," she said. "If yesterday a fortune had fallen to my lot instead of the loss of one, Lord Ravenscourt would have persuaded himself, and me, too, perhaps, that he was in love with me. He would have made me an offer of marriage, and it is just possible that I might have become Lady Ravenscourt. Better poverty than that—better any fate than marriage with a man who wants nobility of soul!"

Did the words ever come home to her when, years afterward, she knew what a noble soul really was?

One by one the guests departed, and Lord Carre was left with his daughter.

He received a letter one morning, saying that Mr. Culross would be at the Abbey at night. He gave it silently into his daughter's hands.

"You will be civil to him, Ianthe, for my sake? My whole future, such as it is, rests in this man's hands."

"Certainly," again promised his daughter. "Why should I not, papa? The young man will surely have the good sense to keep his place this time."

"Ianthe," said Lord Carre, looking at his daughter, "you speak somewhat contemptuously of Mr. Culross. But, remember, he is a millionaire. I should not think there are many wealthier men in England; and money—ah, Ianthe, money does much!"

"It has never made a gentleman—and it never will," she said. "It cannot buy birth, nobility, or talent. I do not see that it is so omnipotent, papa."

"What would I not give for it, Ianthe?" he sighed. "Money would save one of the oldest names in England from discredit and shame; it would restore that which I have lost—my self-respect, my self-esteem; it would give me courage to raise my head once more amongst my fellow-men; it would take from me the brand of shame. Oh, Ianthe, if all the gifts of this fair earth were laid before me now, I should choose—money!"

"Poor papa!" said the girl, quietly. "You may make yourself easy on one point—I will be civil to Mr. Culross. Heaven guide us safely through our troubles!" And so saying, she left him to prepare for the coming guest.

CHAPTER III.

"TROUBLES never come alone," said Lord Carre. "See, Ianthe, here is a letter from Wyndham; he will be home in six months, and he asks me to have his money ready, as he knows of an excellent investment for it. My dear child, can I write and tell him that it is lost? I am in despair."

He bowed his white head, and she had no words with which to comfort him; this brought their trouble nearer to her, and made it more real than it had ever seemed before. He raised his haggard face to hers.

"It will kill me, Ianthe," he said. "I shall never live to meet him."

She could not comfort him. She had love, devotion, the warmest, truest affection to offer him, but no money; and money was the only thing that could help him then. She stood by helpless, while the father she loved so dearly humbled himself before her in his shame and disgrace.

Herman Culross was expected that evening, and it had touched her heart with keenest pain to see the old Earl with trembling hands gathering up his papers, and trying in vain to give matters a proper business aspect.

"He may be a kind-hearted man, after all, Ianthe," he observed, "and anxious to spare me." And then he broke into a passion of child-like tears, crying, "I cannot leave Croombe. I cannot see Croombe pass into his

hands. I would rather burn it down, and die in the ashes."

His daughter shared his passion of grief; rather than leave Croombe, rather than see it pass into the hands of this *parvenu*, she would have set fire to it. But she was young and hopeful. She was only eighteen, and she could not quite believe in this crushing weight of sorrow. Some way out of it would be found. Yet she owned to herself that she did not know of one.

She had promised to be civil to the man who held their future in his hands. The lawyer, Mr. Grantley, was coming at the same time, and she had ordered dinner to be ready at seven, wondering, as she did so, how many more dinners she would order at Croombe—wondering what she would do without servants—she whose least wish had ever been obeyed.

She dressed herself with exquisite taste, not to attract the attention or excite the admiration of Mr. Culross—she was incapable of such an idea—but to please her father, the Earl; and never had the proud Lady Ianthe looked more lovely. She wore a simple evening dress of white silk trimmed with green leaves, and a suite of opals, the changeful light of which suited well her bright regal beauty. The masses of brown rippling hair formed a coronet to the beautiful face. She was imperially fair.

She smiled when she thought of presumptuous Herman Culross, the plebeian, the millionaire, for in the days of his early youth he had dared to raise his eyes to her—had dared to worship her as some bright, far-off star—what was worse, had dared to give that worship voice.

It had happened in this way. As a boy, while the terms of the mortgage were being negotiated, he had been taken to Croombe Abbey ; and there, walking with her governess in the park, he had seen Lady Ianthe—seen what he thought was the fairest vision on earth. Boy as he was, he had become almost insane about her. She had glanced at him only once ; she had looked at him with those calm, serene eyes that took so little interest in anything—looked at him, wondering who he was, and why he was there.

"He is a plebeian," she had said to herself, and had passed on scornfully.

He was only a boy, but that one glance had set his heart on fire. He asked her name, and had lingered in the park, hoping to see her again, and had failed. He had gone home haunted by her, dreaming of her, mad about her ; and, when he could bear his dreams no longer, he had poured out his boyish, passionate love in verse—verse that would have brought tears to kindly eyes, it was so full of love and longing.

After many days he sent it addressed to the Lady Ianthe Carre, and signed with his name. She was quite a child at the time, even as he was a fair-faced boy, but her anger was terrible. A manufacturer's son, a boy lowly born, a plebeian, to dare to send love-verses to her ! Lady Ianthe simply tore the closely-written pages in two, and returned them.

That was years before—but Lady Ianthe had never forgiven the insult, and Herman Culross had never forgotten his love. Through the years of his boyhood and his youth he had remembered her ; he had thought of

her as the fairest girl in the world—as his ideal of perfect loveliness. He had said to himself over and over again that he would rather a hundred times love her memory than be loved by any living woman. He hoped to have done something worthy of a name when he should meet Lady Ianthe Carre again.

He was too young at the time to understand anything about business, and when he grew older he spent much time abroad, so that he did not understand his father's affairs. When, at his father's death, the will was read, and he found himself a millionaire, his surprise was great; it was greater still when he found that his father's chief creditor was the Earl of Carre, who owed him ten thousand pounds. If he could have consulted his own wish, he would have let the money remain, but it was not in his power to do so. By the terms of the will the business was to be sold; all moneys lent on mortgages or invested in shares were to be called in; and the whole of the vast capital was to be safely invested according to directions.

The testator, John Culross, wished his son to become a country gentleman—to enter Parliament—to found a family; and it was discovered that Herman would inherit not less than a million of money. The story of his wealth spread until it was known all over England. He had asked if he was compelled to call in the ten thousand pounds. His solicitors said "Yes"—he was compelled to call it in, although he could lend it again the day after if he chose.

Would he so choose? His heart beat, his face flushed

hotly—he was to see her again, and this time she would not be able to dismiss him with contempt.

He knew nothing of the Earl's misfortunes, and he did not anticipate any difficulty in getting his money. It was something of a surprise to him when he received a letter from Lord Carre asking if it would not be possible to make any other arrangements, as he had a difficulty in finding the money. Then Herman wrote, offering to go over to Croombe; but that offer was really dictated by his longing desire to see Lady Ianthe, not to arrange about the money—he would have given it all for one kind glance from the beautiful eyes that ever haunted him.

He had heard much of Lady Ianthe during the last two years; he knew that she had been one of the leading beauties of the London season. He smiled, too, when he heard that she was called one of the proudest girls in England. He could well believe it, remembering the fate of the verses in which he had told the love of his warm boyish heart. He heard, too, that she was strangely contemptuous about love and lovers—that some of the noblest in the land had sued in vain for a smile from her proud lips—but that, while she was proud and haughty to all the world, to her father she was most loving and devoted.

He had smiled again, saying to himself that a girl who could love and honor her father as Lady Ianthe did must have noble qualities, although perhaps the world did not know them.

Was she one of the proudest girls in England while she stood by the drawing-room fire, her dress slightly

raised, her tiny silk slipper resting on the bright fender? She had strikingly aristocratic grace of figure; her every movement, every action, was dignified and harmonious. Her head was thrown back with a proud, graceful gesture peculiar to herself; her white arms were idly crossed, for she was thinking deeply. Her hands were perfect in shape and color; her face was patrician. There was a splendid light in the beautiful eyes—a proud light that yet could soften into tenderness unutterable.

Was she one of the proudest girls in England? Pride was clearly expressed in the patrician face, in the bright eyes, and the *pose* of the whole figure. But there are different kinds of pride. She was not vain; she would never have dreamed of exalting herself, of glorifying herself, because of her own perfections. She was not vain of her face—its marvelous beauty was no source of pride; and money would never have made her proud. She looked upon wealth as an accident.

Her pride lay in the undue importance she ascribed to high birth. To be nobly born was everything. She did not consider nobility an accident; in her own mind the aristocracy were a privileged race, set aside for and by a nobility of soul to which no plebeian could ever attain. They were set aside from more common men, not because of wealth, but because high birth, length of pedigree, nobility of race, entitled them to peculiar honors. The doctrine that all men were equal made Lady Ianthe shudder. Perhaps her views might have been a little more just if she had been trained by a sensible mother; but her mother had died while she was

still young, and, although she had had tutors and governesses, she had been much alone.

Was this pride of Lady Ianthe's all evil? If good could come from an evil source, good came from that. She would have scorned the idea of disgracing or staining the noble name she bore. She would not have told a lie—have uttered a false word—to save her life. She would have declared, with superb pride, that the Carres were always true. She had the fire and chivalry, the true bravery of her race; she never indulged in vulgar weaknesses, such as gossip and scandal. She invariably defended the absent; she shielded the weak. She took the part of the feeble against the strong. She, one of the proudest girls in England, was kind and gentle to the poor; she was munificently generous to them. She was courteously kind to her inferiors—she had never addressed a proud or scornful word to a servant or an inferior in her life. And why? Because truth, chivalry, courtesy, generosity, were to her the marks of high birth—because the absence of those virtues denoted a plebeian soul. She—Ianthe Carre—could never, would never, do anything unworthy of her name. She did not deny to the plebeian, the lowly born, the poor, the possession of virtues; but then, to her mind, they were of a different kind. She understood that a poor man must be patient, a tradesman honest—patience and honesty, industry and activity, belonged to their order. She could not understand that a poor man might be a hero—the idea of a chivalrous tradesman was beyond her. She disliked the idea of mixing the two orders. She could not pardon the marriage of an aristocrat with a

plebeian—to her the two were far apart; and it was not exactly a vulgar love of rank that possessed her—it was an inborn, sincere conviction that she belonged to a race set apart. Why they should be so set apart she did not know; it was one of those decrees of Providence better understood than explained.

Pride of birth, pride of race, was the girl's besetting sin; but, in her eyes, it had assumed the guise of virtue. She was brilliantly accomplished, yet of her accomplishments she was never vain. Naturally quick and gifted, she had studied hard. She had traveled with Lord Carre. She had read and studied and thought; yet, though she was endowed with keen perception, she had never arrived at the knowledge of her own besetting sin.

She was a girl of singular purity of mind—her innate sense of refinement served as a virtue. She would never have been guilty of flirtation. She would never have attempted to attract admiration. She never courted the smiles and compliments of men; nor, as yet, had she thought much of men or lovers. Her whole heart was given to her father.

Suddenly she started from her listless attitude. There was a sound of carriage-wheels. She knew that he had arrived—this millionaire—this plebeian, who held the name and fortunes of the Carres in the hollow of his hands. She did not move away, but the expression of deep thought passed from her face and gave place to one of attention.

After some minutes, two gentlemen entered the room —one old and gray-haired, whom she recognized as her

father's solicitor, Mr. Grantley; the other, young, tall, with a face full of energy, who was announced as Mr. Culross. She made one step forward, and held out her white jeweled hand in stately greeting to her father's old friend, and then bowed with courtly grace to Herman Culross. She would just as soon have thought of cutting her hand off as of giving it to him, and he noticed the omission.

He was very pleasant to see, this son of the people—this son of a man who had worked hard for his daily bread. He was tall, with a well-knit, manly figure, broad shoulders and broad chest, strong arms and strong though white hands—the kind of man one would like by one's side in a fray—the kind of man in whose arms one would place one's best loved child.

There was something of dignity too in the tall, erect figure—the dignity of independence. The face was in many respects a lovable one—not handsome, but more than pleasant to see. The eyes were large, dark, and frank; they were lighted with a pleasant, luminous smile; they were eloquent too—full of fire and passion. The mouth was firm in repose: the well-shaped lips closed with a line that was almost stern, yet, when he smiled, the smile was sweet and tender as a woman's. It was an earnest, sensitive face; it was a face men trusted implicitly, women liked, and children loved.

Lady Ianthe's calm proud eyes glanced carelessly at it. As his glance met hers, a sudden fire of passion seemed to burn in his face, his lips trembled, the strong earnest man was hardly master of himself. The proud, calm glance had set his heart on fire again.

How he loved her—this fair, imperial girl, who had coolly set him down as not of her world, and treated him with scant courtesy because he was her inferior! He could have knelt and kissed the hem of her dress—he could have cried aloud to her that she was fair, and that he had loved her madly for long years. He had in his own mind rehearsed this little interview many times. He had intended to say, with a very lordly air, that he wished to apologize for his boyish impertinence of years ago; but, looking at her, he dared not do it—the fair, queenly face had no gleam of recognition in it. Besides, his manhood rose in hot rebellion; he would not apologize—he would not call that boyish, earnest, passionate love an impertinence. Did she remember it? He must know: it might pain him to discover that she still resented the love-verses—it might pain him to find that she had forgotten them—but anything was better than indifference.

After a time the Earl came in, and he shook hands warmly with both gentlemen. There was something of trepidation in his manner as he spoke to Herman Culross—a shadow of dread which his daughter observed with surprise. The dinner was announced, and they went to the dining-room.

Lady Ianthe adhered most strictly to the letter of her word. She was "civil" to Mr. Culross—nothing more. If, from any need or obligation, her father had invited one of the neighboring tradesmen to dine, she would have been just as civil. With a courteous smile she acknowledged every remark Herman Culross addressed to her—yet that very smile seemed to widen the distance

between them. She never voluntarily addressed him, except when her position as hostess obliged her. She did not neglect one trivial act of courtesy, yet, when they rose from dinner, Herman felt as though a frozen ocean lay between them. He would bridge it over, he said to himself, let it be as deep and cold and hardly frozen as it might.

Then, after dinner, the Earl and his solicitor had a game at *écarté*. Lord Carre would not broach business that evening. He had asked Mr. Culross if he played at chess, adding that, if he did so, he would find an able opponent in Lady Ianthe. Herman was only too delighted to draw the little chess-table near the fire; he placed an easy-chair and footstool for her. She thanked him with courteous gravity, and they sat down together.

They had played for an hour, and after that Herman said to himself that he must know whether she remembered his boyish love. He looked at her; the fair, high-bred face was bent over the board, her white hands lightly touched the chessmen, there was no indication of the faintest consciousness of his presence. Suddenly he took courage.

"Lady Ianthe," he said, "I trust by this time you have forgiven my boyish indiscretion."

The proud, serene eyes looked indifferently at him.

"It would be ungenerous to remember the faults of the boy against the man," she said, calmly. "I have forgiven it."

The reply silenced Herman for a time. Then she had considered his love a fault—a fault, that impetuous, hon-

est worship which he had lavished on her! It was rather hard. He recovered himself after awhile.

"You must have thought me very presumptuous," he said.

"I beg your pardon, it is your move, not mine. Presumptuous? No, I did not think of you at all."

Again Herman sank back silenced. She had not even found it worth while to be angry. She had simply ignored him. He would not be daunted.

"It was a terrible blow to my vanity," he continued, rashly. "I thought my poor verses very fair."

"Did you? Your queen is in danger, Mr. Culross." The calm pride of her perfect repose was not to be disturbed.

"If I were a wise man," thought Herman, "I should say no more; but I am not wise, and I know I shall commit myself. If she would but look at me—even if angrily—I should not care."

But he found himself suddenly checkmated, and the game ended; and then Lady Ianthe rose, and said "Good evening." She went to her room, quite pleased with herself and her own efforts. She had been very civil to her father's guest.

CHAPTER IV.

LADY IANTHE looked from her window on the morning after the arrival of the two gentlemen. The heavy clouds had parted during the night, and the snow had fallen; it lay like a white, thick, soft mantle over the earth. The sky above was darkly blue, and the wintry rays of the sun shone like palest gold. Far and wide was the snow. The fields were all covered, the hedges were white, the bare branches of the trees were fringed. The green holly held soft white snow in the hollow of its leaves. The scarlet berries gleamed out like points of flame; the robin-redbreast hopped on the white snow and the bare twigs. It was a winter scene so full of poetry that Lady Ianthe could have watched it for hours; but she drew back with a sudden start of pain. Not much longer would she watch those grand old trees, the growth of centuries; not much longer would the magnificent old home be hers. Where the Carres had lived and died the plebeian race of Culross would take up their abode. The girl clasped her hands in passionate sorrow as she thought of it. She would have given her life to save her home from such terrible desecration. They would be sure to cut down the old ancestral oaks, just as they would have new gilding in the drawing-room, and modern pictures in place of old family portraits. Then she remembered that she had to go down and be civil to him, the representative of the race that she detested.

If Herman had thought Lady Ianthe beautiful in her evening dress, he was at a loss what to think of her in plain morning toilet—a simple morning dress of dark rich blue; fastened high, and closed round the white throat, showing every line and curve of the graceful figure. The fair, pure, proud face bloomed with health; the rich rippling brown hair was loosely and gracefully arranged. She bade him "Good-morning," not offering her hand, and just raising her white eyelids, and then took her seat to preside at the breakfast-table. But her presence made paradise for the man who worshiped her with such passionate love.

After breakfast the Earl sent for her. He looked, she fancied, a little more cheerful.

"Ianthe," he said, "I have sent for you because I want particularly to see you. Last night, after you had left us, we had a long talk about my—misfortunes. He was so kind to me—this young Herman Culross; he could not have been kinder had he been my own son."

"I am very glad," she observed, calmly; the idea of being "kind" to her father, Lord Carre, hardly pleased her. Kindness implied something of patronage, and between peer and *parvenu* such a thing was of course absurd.

"He took so great an interest in what I said," continued Lord Carre, "that I confided in him entirely. I told him everything—of the ten thousand pounds owing to him—of the five owing to Wyndham—and of the two hundred thousand borrowed for that detestable silver mine."

"Did you tell him all, papa? You must have trusted him greatly."

"I did—I do. My heart was drawn to him. He is earnest, frank, sincere. I like him so much, Ianthe."

"I am very glad," she said, "that you have found a friend in your troubles, papa. Do they—these gentlemen—see any way out of them?"

"No; they both averred that it was black, bitter, irretrievable ruin—that there was no possible escape from it; but they have promised in every way to do their best. Mr. Grantley is compelled to return to London this evening; but I have asked Herman Culross to remain with us for the next fortnight, at least. He has promised to do so. You will be civil to him, Ianthe?"

"Civil," she repeated, impatiently—"I am always civil to him, papa."

"You will try and amuse him, and make the time pass pleasantly to him?"

"Certainly; I hope, papa, that you are always satisfied with my condnct toward your guests."

"Yes," he replied, wistfully; "but there is a shadow of something in your manner toward Mr. Culross—nothing tangible—a shadow—yet I can feel it. It is as though you never for one moment forgot the difference in your positions."

"There is a difference, papa," she said—"you admit that?"

"Certainly, Ianthe. He is the son of a manufacturer, a man risen entirely from the ranks of the people; you are a daughter of one of the oldest families in England."

"Then, if a difference exists, papa, it should be ob-

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complaint—Herman could not even to himself accuse her; but he would rather have fought with a dozen realities than this intangible shadow. If she had disliked him, he would have fought the dislike inch by inch; if she had hated him, he would have overcome the hatred. She simply overlooked him—and what could he do?

One week of the time had elapsed; and then it occurred to Lady Ianthe that he was taking great interest in her. His devotion to the Earl knew no bounds. He would sit up until the early hours of morning trying to unravel the tangled web of accounts; he would wait upon the old Earl with a gentleness and tenderness that knew no bounds—the tenderness of a woman, the devotion of a son. Lord Carre began to lean upon him, to look up to him; it was touching to see them together—the winning gentleness and deference of the young man, the dependence of the old one.

After a time Lady Ianthe began to wonder at it—she herself was not more devoted to the Earl. And then she noticed how often, in looking up, she found his eyes fixed on her, how he sought every opportunity of being with her, how his face flushed and his hands trembled if by accident she came near him. Almost insensibly, for her father's sake, she began to trust him, to feel confidence in him, although she never for one moment forgot the barrier.

He said but little to her; he never ventured on any compliments; he refrained even from little polite speeches that he might easily have made; and she was grateful to him for the forbearance. There was not so much effort required to keep him in his place—he did

not seem disposed to take advantage of his position, and insensibly she relaxed from her vigilance.

It seemed to her that her father tried to throw them together, that he sought opportunities of bringing her more and more into the society of Mr. Culross. He liked to walk up and down the picture-gallery between them; and, when Lady Ianthe deigned to listen, she found that Herman Culross's conversation was superior to any she had ever heard. He had clear, sound views on most subjects; he was a keen, clever judge of art, a good critic; he had a store of anecdotes, a fund of information; he was a scholar and a student. She was compelled to own that for the son of a manufacturer he was really wonderful.

He had his own ideas of chivalry too; evidently he did not consider it a virtue set apart for the aristocracy. She was even surprised and horrified to find that he dared to discharge little arrows, biting little sarcasms, at the order she loved and believed in. Could it be credited? More than once she heard him laugh at the idea of hereditary genius!

One evening he was with Lord Carre in the library, and their conversation was so deeply interesting that they had never even heard the dinner bell ring. On that day her father had been looking unusually ill, and she had been dreadfully anxious about him.

"What can engross them so entirely?" thought Lady Ianthe to herself; and then, when they came hurriedly into the dining-room it struck her that they both avoided looking at her—that Lord Carre had a wistful, haggard expression on his face—that he was restless and excited.

There was something, too, almost apologetic in his manner to her; while Herman Culross looked eagerly expectant.

"Ianthe," said the Earl, after dinner, "will you join me in a few minutes? I am going to the library."

As she replied, she saw Herman Culross look at her, with a sudden gleam of light in his eyes. When they were alone, he crossed the room, and went over to her side—he was strongly agitated. She was serenely proud and calm.

"Lady Ianthe," he said, in a low voice, "I wish that I dare kneel here at your feet, and pray you to listen favorably to what Lord Carre has to propose."

She raised her serene eyes to his earnest, handsome face.

"You would be greatly out of place, Mr. Culross, at my feet," she rejoined; "and—pray pardon me—it requires no prayers from you to induce me to listen favorably to anything my dear and honored father may have to say."

"But, Lady Ianthe, you do not know—allow me——"

She moved aside, with dignified ease; there was the least suspicion of contempt in the smile with which she interrupted him.

"Pardon me, Mr. Culross; I do not allow any interference between my father and myself. I must ask you to excuse me now, while I go to him."

Without another word, without even a look, she swept from the room. She had been haughty, contemptuous, scornful of him, but he could have knelt and kissed the hem of her robe as she passed him by.

"How does he dare to be so insolent?" she said to herself. "He to pray that I would listen to my father —he, a plebeian, a *parvenu*—I, the daughter of an English earl!"

Her eyes flashed unutterable scorn; her lip curled in a haughty smile; her beautiful face flushed. She went into the library, and saw her father seated in his favorite chair by the fire.

"Close the door, Ianthe," he said. "I want to talk to you without being disturbed."

She saw tears on his face. He stretched out his arms to her.

"Ianthe, my darling, come here," he said—"here, where I can kiss you and plead to you and pray to you!"

She sat down on the little stool at his feet, resting her hands on his knees, looking with tender, loving eyes into his face. Still he seemed in no hurry to begin.

"Ianthe," he said at last. "Help has come. Oh, my darling, I have seen the first gleam of light since the darkness surrounded me, and I am ill, weak, faint with joy! Ianthe, I have seen the way in which I can be saved."

Then his strength seemed to fail him, the courage that upheld him died away; he bent his face over her and wept like a child.

"Only Heaven knows," he sobbed, "what I have suffered, Ianthe! I have seen myself impoverished, imprisoned—my fortune lost—my name disgraced—my only child working for her daily bread. I have heard myself called thief, impostor, and it has nearly killed

me. Now it is all over—all over. I could not have faced it, Ianthe."

"How you have suffered, papa!" she said, gently. "And you have not told me. I did not know one half."

"I could not tell you, my darling. There are sorrows that cannot be put into words. Mine could not—its very magnitude appalled me. It is over, thank Heaven!—I am all unworthy, but I see light at last. I see a stretch of years before me. I see my name held in honor—I see grandchildren climbing round my knee, and I thank Heaven."

Her face brightened as she listened to him.

"I too am glad, dear," she said, gently; "I feel your joy as I did your sorrow. I would have sold my life for you, had I been able."

He looked at her, and she saw something of anxious fear in his eyes. He laid his two hands on her shoulders, gazing at her long and anxiously.

"It all depends on you, Ianthe," he said—"all on you."

"On me, papa? How can that be?"

"You said you would have sold your life to help me, Ianthe. Did you mean it?" he asked.

"I did. I would have freely died to save you—and the name of Carre."

"You have not to die, my darling; you have but to lay aside a prejudice. Listen, Ianthe. Herman Culross is a most noble minded man. He has offered—why, my darling, I can hardly find words in which to tell you of his offer, it is so noble! In the first place,

he will lend again, on terms you shall hear, the ten thousand pounds, so that Croombe, my beloved home, shall not pass from us; next he will place to my account the five thousand pounds that I owe to Wyndham Carre, so that I can repay him at once, and my name not be branded; lastly, of that miserable two hundred thousand I have borrowed, he will, from his own moneys, pay one, and the other is to be repaid by installments from the estate—so that I shall be free. I can hardly say the words, Ianthe—I shall be free. I shall still keep up the state befitting Maurice, Earl of Carre—I shall die with my name unstained, and the world will never know the ordeal through which I have passed."

She kissed the trembling hands that held hers in a feeble grasp.

"He is the noblest, the kindest, the most generous man in all the world," she said; "but, papa darling, how does all this depend on me? I do not understand."

"It depends on you, and you alone, Ianthe," he replied. "Why do you imagine Herman Culross is ready to do all this for us?"

"Because it is a privilege to help you, papa."

"No," said the Earl, "it is because he loves you."

"Loves me!" she repeated haughtily.

"Yes, loves you as I do not think any man ever loved a woman before—loves you, and wants to make you his wife."

"His wife!" she exclaimed, with imperial disdain. "Papa, do you know what you are saying? I—Ianthe Carre—that man's wife!"

"And why not, my darling? Why not?"

"You to ask me such a question! I am a peer's daughter. I have some of the best blood in England in my veins. He is a plebeian, a *parvenu*. I, Ianthe Carre, marry him! I would die a hundred deaths first." She rose in her superb disdain, with flashing eyes and heaving breast.

He rose too, and stood before her, the picture of despair.

"You refuse, Ianthe—you, my only child, who professed your willingness to die for me? You refuse?"

"What else can I do?" she demanded passionately. "I would have given my life for you; but I cannot marry him—a commoner—a manufacturer's son—a man whose hand even I have never touched. He is generous indeed, with true plebeian generosity, to offer to buy me! What is the purchase money, papa! One hundred and fifteen thousand pounds! At least I am highly rated. Oh, that I should have lived to see this day!"

He sat down again under the passionate torrent of her words; and the white, haggard despair that came over his face, even in the midst of her angry pride, frightened her.

"Very well," he said, meekly, "it cannot be, Ianthe. I will not force you, child—my only child. I am not worth saving. There is no light—only the darkness, growing deeper and deeper."

"I cannot sell myself, papa," returned Ianthe. "If he is so generous and so kind, let him help without any reference to me—that would be generosity."

"But, Ianthe, he loves you," was the eager rejoinder.

"He tells me that he has loved you for many years. He caught a glimpse of you when he came here a boy. He says that he has loved you ever since—that he has never even cared to look into another woman's face. There is constancy for you! Oh, Ianthe, does it not touch your heart—this long, silent love of years?"

"How could he love me? He was only a boy," she said, scornfully. "What is a boy's love? He was an impertinent boy, or he would not have dared to think of such a thing."

"He is not a boy now, Ianthe," observed the Earl, sadly.

"No, but he has the impertinence of one," she returned hastily. "I cannot do it, papa. Pride of race is stronger in me than love of life! I cannot marry this man, who owes his position to trade."

She turned away with a quick shudder, and then looked down in fear. Her father was kneeling at her feet, his white head bent in lowly supplication before her. He held out his hands.

"See, Ianthe, I am praying to you, my dear; for my sake, for Heaven's sake, help me—do not leave me to die in despair!"

"You torture me!" she cried. "Oh, papa, do not kneel there at my feet! You make me ashamed."

"You will grant my prayer, Ianthe—you will save me?" he moaned.

"Give me until to-morrow," she said. "I—I cannot answer you at once."

And, bending hastily over him, and touching his worn face with her quivering lips, she quitted the room.

"Until to-morrow." At least it was a respite of some hours, and would give her time to think.

CHAPTER V.

It was well for Herman Culross that Lady Ianthe did not meet him as she went to her room—he would have fared ill. She was cruelly unjust and unkind to him. She was irritated against him with passionate anger because he had dared to think of her as his wife. That he should have dared, because of the mere vulgar accident of wealth, to ask her to marry him. That he should have been so blind as to overlook the difference between them! That he should have imagined anything could bring her, Lady Carre, to his level!

"To talk of loving me!" she cried, haughtily. "To call his boyish impertinence love, and to tell my father! To talk of his constancy to me! Does he think that I am a white slave, to be purchased by so much gold—to be bought, because my father needs money?"

With clasped hands and angry eyes she walked rapidly to and fro.

"It is so like a commercial transaction," she said bitterly. "He looks upon it as such. My father is ruined—he is in urgent need of so much money. This man comes and says he shall have it; but my father's daughter shall be the price. A nobleman would have given the money—lent it—without such condition, or would

have refrained from offering it. He asks its value. Could anything be more plebeian! Could anything mark more strongly the difference between the two races. He offers, in fact, to buy me—me, Ianthe Carre! I will not marry him. I would rather die! I would rather suffer poverty, hunger or anything else, than marry him, lowly born, lowly bred."

It was quite decided. She would not marry him. She would have the pleasure of showing him how a woman of rank could bear anything better than a marriage like that. She would have the triumph of showing him that she valued nobility of birth far more than the glittering bauble of wealth. She rehearsed over and over again to herself the bitter, cutting, sarcastic words in which she would tell him this—the haughty dismissal she would give him—this man who had insulted her with his love and his money.

He would go then. He would leave Croombe, and, in all probability, they would never see him again. Her father would miss him—would miss his kindly services, his constant care; and she herself would feel perhaps a certain kind of loss. He had been so kind and useful; but then he had marred all by his unbounded presumption.

"I should really have begun to like him in a certain kind of way," she said to herself, "if he had not done this; but this I shall never pardon."

She did not even feel a woman's natural vanity in the idea that such a man loved her and wished to marry her. She could not understand the compliment coming from him—it was an insult.

She went on with her musings. He would go: he would pass out of their life forever; and then the thunderbolt would fall—then would come shame, disgrace, ruin. Croombe would pass into his hands; Wyndham would learn that his money had all been spent; there would be shame and sorrow unutterable. Thus would end the noble and ancient race whose glory had been so dear to her.

Never mind—she would have had her triumph! She would have dismissed the man who had humiliated her. He would be master at Croombe, but he would have found some one who despised his money and his low birth.

Suddenly she saw, as in a dream, a white head bent before her—her father kneeling to her with outstretched hands, praying her, for Heaven's sake, to help him, to save him. She who professed to love him so dearly had refused to save him. She would enjoy her triumph, but what of him? Then she remembered his joy—childlike in its excess. He did not seem to have doubted her acceptance of the terms, and she had refused them.

How he had suffered! What agony of mind he must have endured! Now that the only gleam of light had departed, what might not happen?

She grew frightened. Sorrow and despair such as his had led to suicide. Of course it was a cowardly action—every one knew that. But her father was old and feeble; trouble had worn away the strength of his mind and his intellect; he was confused in his ideas.

What could she do? Watch over him incessantly? Yes. She had his life in her hands, and she was refus-

ing to save it. With one word—only one word—she might make him happy beyond all measure—beyond all words. She might restore him to affluence, to power, to happiness, to peace and self-respect. She might give to him the reality of his dream, length of days and a peaceful grave.

The vision of the old Earl kneeling before her touched the girl's heart with keenest pain.

"My poor father, my dear father, to pray such a prayer to his only child, and to be refused!" It seemed terribly cruel—nay, the more she thought of it the more she shrank from her decision. Could she, his beloved child, plunge him again into the abyss of despair from which he had been almost rescued?

Was there no other alternative? An idea occurred to her. She would see Herman Culross herself, and ask him if he could suggest nothing but marriage; he would not dare too make love to her himself. She felt sure of that—he stood too much in awe of her—but he would listen, and he would perhaps suggest something else.

She would see him early in the morning, and tell him that nothing should induce her to consent to the marriage—it was simply an absurdity—but that, if he could find some means of befriending her father she would be grateful to him all her life. Then she tried to sleep, but her pillow that night seemed a hard one. There was no rest to be found on it; she could only meditate on the morrow's meeting.

She rose early; she resolved to see him as soon as she could—to end the suspense and the misery, to see what could be done. Unconsciously, she lingered long over

her toilet; she wished to look her very best—not to attract his attention, but that she might impress him the more deeply with her dignity.

She remembered then that it would not perhaps be very pleasant to breakfast alone with a man whom she intended to crush with her scorn. She sent an apology to him, and ordered breakfast to be served to him in the dining-room. Herman hardly knew what to argue from that—did it bode good or ill fortune? He was soon to know; while Lady Ianthe summoned all the pride and courage of her race to do battle with the man who was at the same time her greatest friend and her greatest foe.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE of the prettiest rooms at Croombe Abbey was the morning-room. It was set aside for the use of the ladies of the family, and was furnished with the utmost taste and elegance. It opened into a conservatory that even in winter was filled with blooming flowers and singing birds; that opened, in its turn, on to a soft green lawn, where, during the summer, pretty fountains rippled and grand old trees cast a grateful shade. It was an elegant rather than a handsome room. White lace curtains, hangings of pale-rose silk, a few exquisite water-colors, and a white Psyche with a basket of crimson flowers at her foot, made it a charming retreat.

It was here that Lady Ianthe resolved upon seeing Herman. She sent to say that she awaited him, and through the wide-open door he caught a view of her as she stood expecting him. She was leaning against the white Psyche, her white hands touching the crimson flowers, her elegant morning dress sweeping the ground, her graceful figure slightly bent, deep thought and grave anxiety on the beautiful, pure, high-bred face.

The man's whole heart went out to her with deep, passionate love that was almost pain.

"She is my queen," he thought—"beautiful as she is proud; but I will win her, if she is to be won."

She did not hear him at first; and when, at the sound of footsteps, she looked up and saw him, her face burned with a crimson flush. He went hastily forward to greet her; and she could not help seeing the passion in his face, the love in his eyes. He held out his hand hurriedly to her; but she shrank from the impassioned greeting.

"Good-morning, Mr. Culross," she said—"I wished to see you, if you have a little time to spare."

"I have always time to spare for you, Lady Ianthe. I ask for nothing better than to give my whole life to you."

She held up her hand, drawing back from him with such a gesture of scorn that he could not mistake it. Then, for half a minute, she was silent—not from want of words, but because she had so much to say that she hardly knew where to begin. He took advantage of her silence.

"Lady Ianthe," he began, "you have seen Lord

Carre; may I hope and pray that you have a favorable answer for me?"

She saw the passionate love and wistfulness in his face. In any other's it would have touched her deeply; in him it simply hardened her heart. Her proud bright eyes glanced serenely at him.

"It is of that I wished to speak to you, Mr. Culross; let me ask you first, is there no mistake? Have you really laid such a proposition before the Earl, my father?"

"There is no mistake, Lady Ianthe," he replied; "I love you, and the one passionate, longing desire of my heart is to make you my wife."

"We will place the matter in a truer light, Mr. Culross," she observed, her lip curling. "My father is in urgent need of some money, and this money you have offered him as the price of his daughter's hand."

"That is an ungenerous and—pardon me—untruthful way of stating the fact. Lady Ianthe, I ask you to be my wife because I love you as I believe man has rarely loved woman before; I love you so that I would freely give my life for you."

She drew her graceful figure to its full height, and looked at him.

"Do you know, Mr. Culross," she said, "that for you to talk to me about what you please to call love is great presumption?"

"Why, Lady Ianthe?" he asked, calmly.

"The question hardly requires an answer," she replied. "We are of a different race, of a different order. I have no wish to be rude or to speak unpleasant truths, but are you aware that, but for the fact of my

father's being indebted to you, you would never have been a visitor at Croombe?"

"I bless the happy fact of the debt," he remarked.

"You ask me, Ianthe Carre, to marry you," she said. "Listen. The women of my race have never yet contracted a low marriage."

"Pardon me," he interrupted, with a hot flush, "I should not a call a marriage with myself a low marriage."

"I should," she declared, with cold *hauteur;* "the women of my race have married always in their own rank. You cannot ask me to forget the traditions of my order so far as to marry the son of a man who owes his position to trade."

"I do ask it, Lady Ianthe," he said.

"I should expect my dead ancestresses to rise from their graves and cry out against such a desecration, as I may call it, Mr. Culross," she rejoined, quickly.

"There are desecrations that seem to me even greater, Lady Ianthe," he said, quietly. "You do well to speak of such things as the traditions of your race; your ideas are indeed traditionary. The haughty exclusiveness of high birth is fast dying out; man meets his fellow-man now on more equal terms; there are more aristocracies recognized now than of birth, which is after all a mere accident, as you know."

She drew back, as though the words had stung her.

"I know nothing of the kind," she returned, haughtily. "Wealth I consider a mere accident, because fortune is blind and never follows merit; but with nobility it is quite another thing."

"There are other aristocratics," he said, "that will in time do away with this; the nobility of genius, of talent, of industry, of virtue, is, to my mind, superior to mere nobility of birth."

"We will argue no more," she decided, "for we shall never agree. I value noble birth above everything else; and, believe me, Mr. Culross, I could not overlook the want of it."

She turned haughtily away, but he drew nearer to her.

"Lady Ianthe, stay and listen to me. It was not to argue on this world-worn topic that we have met. Your opinions are part of yourself; I respect them—I will never seek to controvert them—I will refrain from ever giving utterance to mine. Try to forget and to overlook these barriers of caste—try to think of me only as the man who loves you so that he would die for you." His words died away in a passionate murmur; the passion of his love shone in his face.

"I cannot," she replied; "I could never forget the distance between us so as to love you—do not ask me."

"Then you decidedly refuse me?" he said.

Suddenly there came to her mind the memory of the old Earl kneeling with outstretched hands, and crying to her for help. Could she send this only chance of help far from him.

"Stay, Mr. Culross," she said, hastily; "let me ask you, in my turn, can you not be generous, and help my father without—without reference to me?"

"No," he replied, calmly, "you ask what is beyond me—I cannot."

"It is so like a trader," she cried, proudly, "to ask

a price even for his virtues, to sell even his benevolence, to wish to purchase a wife whom he can obtain on no other terms. A man of birth would save my father and scorn to make his daughter's hand the price of his safety."

"Not if he loved that daughter," said Herman Culross. "Pardon me, a man who loves a woman will try all he can to win her."

"That is plebeian love, Mr. Culross—a man of birth loves differently; he prefers the happiness of the woman he loves to his own."

"Pardon me again if I venture to say that your notions are quite fanciful, Lady Ianthe. Will you let me speak to you about what you are pleased to call plebeian love—love which, if you had seen it in a man whom you deemed noble, you would have considered exalted chivalry."

"I cannot prevent your telling me what you choose, Mr. Culross," she said, with an air of resignation. "I have no choice, save to listen."

"Many years ago," he began, "when I was quite a boy, I was invited to spend my holidays with my father's solicitor in London; and it so happened that on our way thither, business brought him to Croombe, and I came with him. I was only a boy, Lady Ianthe, untrained, unformed, ignorant—a manufacturer's son, utterly, I grant, beneath the notice of Lady Carre; but the ignorant boy, the manufacturer's son, had, I suppose, a poet's soul and an artist's mind—had something in him that raised him above a mere clod. I was a boy; and, walking in this grand old park of yours, where the trees are

centuries old, I saw what seemed to my boyish eyes a vision of perfect grace and bewildering beauty—a bright young girl, who passed me with drooping eyes. She vouchsafed me one glance—proud, careless, indifferent —and then went on her way and forgot me; but my heart went with her. I was only a boy, standing under the light of the summer sky, blinded, dazed, bewildered by the bright vision—only a boy—yet in that moment a man's passionate love came to me, and I was a boy no more. How that fair, proud, girlish face haunted me afterward! Look where I would, I saw nothing but the proud eyes and tender, haughty lips. Only a boy, yet to be so haunted! I inquired, and found that the fair vision was no other than Lady Carre. Then I said to myself that I would study hard, that I would work as man had never worked, that I would make for myself a name that should be famous all over the land, and then, if I could, I would win Lady Carre. I was a boy when I made that resolve, but my love grew with my growth; it shielded me in every temptation, it helped me in every difficulty, it spurred me on to the dizziest heights of ambition; and now—now, Lady Ianthe, that time has matured it—that it has grown to be more to me than life itself, I bring it to you, and, kneeling at your feet, offer it to you.'

The passion of his words touched her—the handsome pleading face touched her—but she drew back coldly.

"I cannot take it," she said, "for I can never return it."

"If I were what you call noble, Lady Ianthe, would you be touched by this great and constant love?"

"If you were of my order," she said, "I might learn to care for you."

"And in one nobly born you would say that was a chivalrous love?"

"Yes," she replied, frankly, "I should."

"But, because I am a son of the people, a man whose father rose by his own industry, you consider my love an impertinence, and you refuse to accept it?"

"Yes," she answered, candidly.

Herman Culross stood for a few minutes in silence; he did not know how to contend with pride so bitter, so great as this.

"Will you tell me one thing, Lady Ianthe?" he asked. "Do you love any one else?"

She did not answer at first—the struggle in her own mind was great. Pride urged her to refuse to answer, but the memory of her father on his knees urged her to temporize.

"I do not love any one else," she replied; "I love only my father."

"Then, Lady Ianthe," he said, "even were your heart harder and colder than marble, I shall win you yet—I shall win you by the force of my own great, mighty, passionate love."

"Mr. Culross," she said, quietly, "it is quite impossible for me to love you. I cannot alter my whole nature—I cannot act against the cherished convictions of my whole life. Will you not be generous, and save my father without asking this great sacrifice from me?"

"I cannot," he replied. "If you had confessed that you loved any one else, I would say no more; but you

are to be won—therefore will I give my whole life to the winning of you."

"You will not succeed," she said. "It were better that the whole race of the Carres should sink into obscurity than that the last of them should stain her name by such a marriage."

"You refuse me because I am a commoner—because I have no pedigree, am not of noble birth?"

"Yes, for those reasons," she said.

"Lady Ianthe," he continued, earnestly, "do you think that noble souls belong, like hereditary estates, to men of noble birth?"

"I have always believed so," she replied.

"Have you never heard of a nobleman being a thief, a forger, robbing his ward, betraying his trust?"

"Those are the exceptions, not the rule," she answered.

"Still you have heard of such?"

"I do not deny it."

"And you have heard of poor men who have not hesitated to give their lives to save others—of soldiers receiving the bayonet-thrust meant for their captain—of sailors giving their place in a life-boat to a woman and child and dying in their stead—of firemen content to save a little one and die in its place—you have heard of such?"

"Yes," she replied, slowly, "I have."

"Then how can you say that noble souls belong only to men of noble birth? You see that it is not so. Some of our greatest men have sprung from the people. Lady Ianthe, let me prove to you that a commoner's son can

be chivalrous and true—let me prove to you that I, though sprung from the people, can love you as loyally and nobly as any peer of the realm."

"I cannot," she said, with more of pride and *hauteur* than he had seen in her yet. "It is an impossibility."

For a few minutes silence fell over both. Herman was the first to break it.

"I repeat, Lady Ianthe," he said, "that, if your heart were colder and harder than this marble Psyche, I would win you by the might of my passionate love. You think that you would make a great sacrifice if you married me, and that the sacrifice would be all yours?"

"I do think so," she put in.

"Then will you listen to me for a few minutes longer? If I could hope to interest you in my father, I should tell you of how he worked incessantly, how he toiled almost night and day, how he accumulated a vast fortune by his own talent and industry, how he lived and died with one great hope—it was the hope of being the founder of a family."

"A poor ambition," she replied.

"Poor in your eyes, Lady Ianthe, great in his," commented Herman; and then he resumed—"He talked to me of nothing else. He hoped and prayed that in time the name of Culross might be a power in the land, and he trained me in that hope. When your father spoke to me and told me his troubles, I buried that hope—I laid it at your feet. I told him that if you would learn to care for me I would consent to his wish. I would take out by letters-patent the right to bear your name, so that it should not die; and, believe, me Lady Ianthe, scorn

me as much as you may, I make as great a sacrifice in renouncing my father's favorite idea as you would do in giving up the cherished prejudice of your life. It is a sacrifice to me, but I make it most gladly, as I would the sacrifice of my life, were it pleasing to you."

"I do not respect you the more for it," she replied, coldly. "A man who had any name to be proud of would not so lightly give it up."

"It is for your sake, Lady Ianthe. Oh, listen to me! Let me plead to you, pray to you! In time you must appreciate my great love—must learn to understand it—must return it—I am content to wait."

"Yet your great love will not permit you to save my father without sacrificing me?"

"No; for in so doing I lose my only chance of winning you. Do not send me away! If you will not be kind to me for my own sake, be so for your father's. You would smile on me if you had seen his face brighten when I laid all my plans before him. Lady Ianthe, I only ask permission to lavish my wealth on you—to use it in your service. I will make your father's heart glad with inexpressible joy. I will clear off all his debts. I will restore this grand old domain to more than its ancient grandeur. I will devote my whole life to the Earl and to you. I will be content to sink my own identity. I will work and strive and labor for the glory of the Carres of Croombe. Will you give me one word of encouragement, Lady Ianthe?"

He had drawn nearer to her, and in the passionate hurry of his words he laid one hand on hers. She withdrew it as though he had suddenly touched it with fire;

and then, with a strangely frank smile, she looked at him.

"How can you ask me to marry you when I shrink from the very touch of your hand?" she asked.

"But you would not always. I have faith in my own great love. It would win something in return. Lady Ianthe, if you send me away you will kill your father. All his hopes are based on this marriage."

"Do you think it is manly to force me into a marriage because I love my father—because it is the only way in which I can save him?" she asked, with sudden passion.

"I should not think it manly if I despaired of winning your love and making you happy; but I know I can do both. I have faith to that extent."

She knew that he had spoken the truth—that the only means of saving her father's life, of saving the old name from discredit and disgrace, was by marrying him—yet at the moment that she realized it she most disliked him. She opened her beautiful eyes and looked fixedly at him.

"Are you content to marry me," she asked, "knowing that I despise you—that I look upon you with contempt?"

"Lady Ianthe," he said, "I shall know how to change that into love; and I would rather have your contempt, your scorn, than the warmest affection of any other woman!"

"Are you content to marry me, knowing that I feel that nothing can bridge over the distance between us— nothing can set you by my side as my equal—nothing can make me forget that you are a plebeian—nothing can make me overlook your social inferiority?"

"I am content," he replied. "You love no one else—it will all come in time."

"My love will not come," she cried—"never think that."

"I am content," he repeated.

For some minutes she was silent, evidently struggling with her anger, and then she said, slowly:

"I repeat that you are doing an unmanly thing in forcing me to marry you. You force me because you leave me no alternative; I must crush my father or marry you. I love my father, as I have always done, better than the whole world besides; that love is the master-passion of my life. To save him, I am driven to marry a man whom I neither know, nor like, nor esteem, nor love."

"It will come," he repeated. "I love you so dearly, and I long so passionately for your love, that I shall be content with any terms."

Her face flushed crimson.

"Will you?" she returned. "Then I will make those terms as difficult for you as I can. I will be your wife—that is, you shall bear my name—but you shall never even touch my hands; you will have secured me, you will have fast bound me—that seems to me all you wish—but no word of love shall ever cross my lips to you; we shall be together, and yet be further apart than strangers—together without love or affection. If I consent at all, it will be only on those terms. It is for you to decide whether you will accept them. If, after accepting, you break them, presume to ask from me words of affection, presume to touch my hand, to thrust your

society upon me, then I swear that I will instantly leave the house. Are you satisfied to have me as your wife on those terms?"

He looked at her; she was to him so royally beautiful in her scorn, so fair in her anger and defiance, so much more winning even so than any other woman in her most complaisant mood that he felt that he could have given his life even for that small victory.

"Yes," he said. "You love no one else. I am content to wait; you will know me and love me better in time."

"Then, if on those terms you consent to lose your identity, and devote your life to the service of the Carres of Croombe," she said, imperially, "I accept your service, and our interview is ended."

She spoke with ill-concealed contempt; but Herman Culross repeated to himself that love would come in time.

CHAPTER VII.

For some time after Lady Ianthe had swept from the room, Herman Culross stood thinking profoundly. To him, a son of the people, a man of thought and culture, a broad-souled, large-minded philosopher, there was something almost unreal in Lady Carre's strong family pride. He could not understand it. He could have un-

derstood her being proud of her beauty, or of her magnificent home, but her pride of ancestry was quite beyond him. He thought of it with a smile as the caprice, the whim, the one failing of the loveliest woman he had ever seen. He should be well able to conquer it, he thought; at least, she loved no one else—that was one great point, one great ground of hope. She loved no other man, and, though he was not even to touch her hand or presume to say one affectionate word to her, still they would be together—they would be under the same roof, they would have at least some cares and some duties in common. It would be strange if, with all those opportunities, he could not win her love.

At first he had been inclined to reject her terms with as much scorn as she had shown herself—they were unworthy of him and his love. Then it occurred to him that he could give her a lesson in true nobility. He would give her all and take nothing—he would pour out his devotion with so lavish a hand that she would not be able to help returning some of it. She should see that it was possible for a commoner to have the soul of a gentleman. He would treat her with such chivalry, such delicacy, that she would be compelled to admire him, to admit that a plebeian could have the virtues that she seemed to consider belonged by right divine to the nobles of the land. How proud she was, how scornful, how imperious, but, oh, how beautiful and bright!

Only to be near her, to breathe the same air, to look at her radiant face, to listen to the music of her voice, to watch the grace of her movements—it would be bliss

to him. He would win her yet—great love must win great love. The day would come when she would go to him, when she would clasp her white arms round his neck, when she would rest her fair, proud face on his breast, and say, "My husband, I have learned to love you at last." It was worth all the scorn, all the contempt, all the weary waiting. He was content, and, with the whole force of his honest heart, he resolved to do his best—to make her happy and let her have her own way.

Lady Ianthe went at once to her father.

The old Earl's face had a wistful expression as he raised it to hers.

"You have no good news for me, Ianthe," he said, despondingly; "there is none in your eyes."

"Perhaps you will think it good, papa. I am come to tell you that I have accepted Mr. Culross."

He could not repress the cry of joy that rose to his lips; his whole aspect changed. His cares and troubles seemed to fall from him; he rose from his seat stronger and more erect than she had seen him for many a day.

"My darling," he said, "my beloved Ianthe, you have saved my life."

"And wrecked my own," she thought. But meekly and quietly she received the caresses and thanks he lavished on her; and then, when he was calmer and could listen to her, she said:

"I have been quite frank with Mr. Culross, papa. I have told him that I do not love him, and that I never shall."

"Never shall?" repeated the Earl, in dismay.

"No, papa—never! I have explained to him what I think of such marriages as this—what I think of social barriers—that nothing can set him by my side as my equal."

The Earl looked at her in astonishment and fear.

"Great Heaven! And what did he say?"

She paused for a few minutes, and then replied:

"All that he said was very sensible in its way; he did not seem at all surprised."

"I should have been very much surprised had I been in his place," said Lord Carre. "I have never heard of such an acceptance."

"I showed him the matter as it really stands—that it is simply a business transaction—a commercial arrangement quite in his line. You want a certain sum of money; he has it to lend, and promises to lend it if he may call me wife. I have given him permission to do so. You see there is no question of sentiment; it is purely a business-arrangement. I appealed to his generosity; I asked him to help you without any reference to me. But he declined; and then I placed the matter on its proper footing."

"But, Ianthe," cried the Earl, "he loves you—he does indeed! If ever a man loved a woman, he loves you. How cruel you are to him! How proud you are!"

"It is not a question of love, papa—believe me. I have told him that I do not, and never shall, love him; yet, if he will not save you on any other terms, I am quite willing to call myself his wife."

"Well," said Lord Carre, "he and you know best.

It is a strange affair. He is satisfied, I suppose; but I would not marry a woman who said she did not love me, and designated the marriage as a matter of business."

"Probably not," allowed Lady Ianthe; "but then you are an Earl, and he is a commoner. He is content to accept that which you would scorn. You may be at rest now, papa—you are saved; there will be no more trouble for you."

He forgot the strangeness of the position then, and fell on her neck, weeping aloud in the fulness of his joy, crying out that she had saved him—that he was free—and praying Heaven to bless her.

"It will all come right in time," he thought. "She will be compelled to love him when she realizes how good and generous and kind he is."

After that Ianthe went to her own room, and was seen no more that day.

Lord Carre and Mr. Culross had an interview in the evening. They were both rather shy of approaching the subject at first; it was the Earl who broached it.

"My daughter has told me the good news," he said, smiling. "I am to call you my son-in-law."

"Yes," responded Herman; "and I hope to prove a good and true one."

"You found my warning correct—my daughter is really one of the proudest girls in England."

"Your daughter is all that is beautiful and charming. I consider myself the most fortunate of men."

"She must have rather astonished you, though, with her ideas," observed the Earl.

"She could never do anything but delight me; the

least caprice sits charmingly on her. I have no fear, Lord Carre. She says she does not love me; but, if the whole strength and power and might and ardor of a man's heart can win a woman, I shall win her yet."

"I am sure of it—it is only a matter of time," returned the Earl.

And then they began to discuss the business in detail. If she would consent, the marriage was to be at the end of April. The mortgage was to be paid off at once. Herman would place five thousand pounds to Lord Carre's account immediately, so that Wyndham might draw it when he would. And steps were to be taken forthwith for the repayment of the enormous loan.

To carry out these arrangements it was necessary that Herman Culross should go to London. Before going he wished to have some definite idea as to the date of the marriage—an empty ceremony indeed, since it was to give him neither the love nor the heart of his wife, not even the right to clasp her hand, but not empty after all, since it was to bind her to him for life.

He consulted Lady Ianthe upon the point. She looked at him with proud, silent reproach.

"You must know that it is a mere idle form to ask me such a question," she said. "What can it possibly matter to me?"

"I ventured to hope that you might take some slight interest in it," replied Herman, with unconscious satire.

"It is a business arrangement," she said, "and as such it can be speedily arranged. If April will suit the Earl, my father, I have no objection to raise. There is one thing I should like to mention—we shall be com-

pelled, I suppose, to go somewhere for what is so foolishly called the honeymoon—complete nonsense in our case, yet we must conform to the world's customs; I wish to say that I hope it will be arranged with as little fuss and ceremony as possible."

"You shall be obeyed, Lady Ianthe," Herman promised, and she turned haughtily away.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was a strange wedding, although no outward form or ceremony was wanting. Lord Carre had insisted upon having everything *en règle;* he would have nothing omitted. No marriage could have been conducted with greater state. All that was lacking was love. The three months of preparation had been passed in a state of perfect indifference by Lady Carre. She had accepted her fate, and so she submitted in silence. All was lost for her except love for her father. Let life be what it might, she had saved him.

She was serenely calm, proudly indifferent. Happily for her, she knew nothing of other love. Her life had been filled by entire devotion to her father. She had set aside all the homage offered to her. The love of suitors, the dawning love of woman's life, was, happily, as a dead letter to her, for, if she had had to fight against love in addition to her other troubles, her life

would indeed have been a hard one. She was serenely indifferent when questioned or consulted about the arrangements for the wedding. She replied much as she would have done had it been the marriage of a stranger. Her interest was aroused only when her father was concerned. If his pleasure or his convenience was in question, then she was quite alive to everything; if the matter concerned simply herself, she was proudly indifferent; if it concerned Mr. Culross, she was something more than proud.

At the end of April they were married in the old church at Leahurst. The sun shone clear on that strange wedding-morn—nature seemed to be bright and rejoicing. All the notabilities of the county had been invited. There was a train of bridemaids from among the fairest and noblest girls in England. They were in raptures with the wedding, for Herman had spared no pains, no expense. He seemed to have thought that the singularity of the circumstances would be overlooked amid a profusion of magnificent gifts. No bridemaids had ever been presented with more costly mementos. They were loud in his praises—he was so generous, so handsome, so kind of heart. A sumptuous wedding-breakfast was prepared, a large party of guests was invited. The children from the Leahurst schools were all present strewing flowers before the bride—the bells of Leahurst Church pealed merrily. There was a grand *fête* for the tenantry, a feast for the children.

People had nothing but praise for the wedding. The bride was so imperiously beautiful, her costume so magnificent—the bridegroom so handsome and so generous

—the old Earl so happy—every one so highly pleased and pleasant—they agreed that it was a long time since anything so delightful or so charming had been seen. No one observed that the pride of the beautiful bride was unbending, that every now and then there came over the bridegroom's face an expression of deepest sorrow—no one guessed that it was a marriage entirely without love, "a mere business arrangement"—no one knew that the generous bridegroom was ill with the fever of love, that he would have laid down his life that day for one smile from the proud lips beside him—no one guessed that the beautiful young bride had nothing but contemptuous scorn for the man by her side.

So they stood side by side before the altar, repeating the solemn words that bound them together for life; and, if ever man meant those words, it was Herman Culross—they came from the depths of his heart. Lady Ianthe tried not to think of them. The only thing that sustained her and gave her courage was the pleased, happy, bright expression of her father's face.

Standing there before the altar, Herman for the first time held her hand clasped in his, the little white ungloved hand without jewels—he held it, and it was wonderful what a strange novel sensation the touch gave him. Had Lady Ianthe been able, she would have withdrawn her hand from him in indignant haste. Part of their compact was that he was not to touch her hand; but the eyes of the world were on them, so the little hand lay quite still and passive in his warm clasp. He held it while the ring was placed upon it, and presently he gently relinquished it, saying to himself that it would be

long before he held it again. But there was a look in his face before which Lady Ianthe's eyes drooped, and which caused her heart to beat with strange, quick emotion.

They were man and wife. The organ pealed forth—the bells rang—there was a stir in the brilliant assembly. Herman's heart beat rapidly, there was a flush on his face, but the countenance of the bride was cold and impassive. Some few noticed that the newly married pair did not walk hand in hand or arm in arm down the church aisle. Herman assisted his wife into the carriage, and then took his seat by her side, both bowing in response to the lingering cheer of the people and the children; but they exchanged few words during the drive. Looking at his young wife, he thought she was unusually pale.

"Are you very tired, Lady Ianthe?" he asked; and she answered "Yes."

Presently, as the carriage neared the grand entrance, she turned to him hurriedly.

"When we are quite alone," she said, in a low voice, "you will of course address me just as you please; but perhaps, now that we are married, it will be as well for you to call me Ianthe—it will cause less remark."

He smiled, but there was something of bitterness in his smile.

"If you consider it no breach of the contract, I shall be happy to do so," he replied.

Then they entered the house together. Guests, visitors, friends, crowded round them; good wishes, kind words, hearty greetings, met them on all sides. Lady

Ianthe listened with a charming smile on her beautiful face, Herman with hope and bitterness mingled in his heart; they might all be realized, all these good wishes, some day, when his dream should be accomplished and his wife should clasp her arms round his neck and say, "I love you." It was worth waiting for, and he would wait.

The wedding breakfast was a great success; the superb wedding presents were laid out in the grand drawing-room. There were speeches and toasts; and then it was announced that the hour of departure had arrived.

The newly married pair were to spend the honeymoon in Paris; but before they set out the Earl left his guests, and went to a room seldom opened—the room where Ianthe's fair young mother had died. From there he sent for his daughter. She came to him, calm, composed, indifferent.

"My darling," said the old Earl, in a trembling voice, "I have sent for you because I wish to speak to you here in this room where your poor mother died; I want to thank and to bless you—to thank you because you have saved me from terrible shame, from great disgrace—to bless you for your goodness and your love."

She bent down to kiss him, and for the first time that day tears came to her eyes. If he was so well content, then indeed her sacrifice was well repaid.

"I cannot tell you, Ianthe, how happy I am," he went on. "Life is not the same; I am twenty years younger. And do you know, my darling, I have an idea that I shall live twenty years longer, that I shall see my every hope fulfilled, that I shall see my grandchildren

climb my knee, that I shall hear the music of childish voices, and grow young again in the light of childish faces. Oh, Ianthe, how I bless you—how I thank you!"

She had no words in which to answer him, but she kissed the trembling hands and worn face.

"I am glad you are so well content," she returned; "you make me very happy, papa."

And then the Earl took her hands in his.

"One word before you go, Ianthe. You are proud—people call you one of the proudest girls in England. Do not be proud to your husband. He may be inferior to you in birth, in social position, in ancestry, in pedigree; but he has the heart of a king—he is one of nature's noblemen, a man above most men. Love him, Ianthe; he is worthy of all love. He would have been a fitting husband for the noblest woman on earth. Make him happy, for we owe all our happiness to him. You will not forget?"

What could she say—she, who had forbidden her husband to address one kindly word to her, who had treated him with the haughtiest disdain? She merely clasped her arms round the old man's neck, and said:

"I will do my best, papa. Thank Heaven you are happy?" And then they came to tell her it was time to go.

CHAPTER IX.

THE last farewell had been spoken, the last greeting uttered, the Lady Ianthe left her father's home with the husband she so heartily contemned by her side. On the morning of the wedding the letters-patent had arrived, and he was henceforward to be known as Mr. Carre. It had cost him a sharp pang to part with the name his father had desired to be ennobled, but what would he not have borne for her?

At the last moment Lady Ianthe had changed her mind. She would not go to Paris—she preferred going at once, she said, to Ostend. So they were to go by the night boat from Dover to Ostend.

The railway journey to Dover was a pleasant one. To her intense relief, no one seemed to imagine that they were a newly married pair commencing their honeymoon. Perhaps it was for this purpose that she had chosen a plain sombre traveling costume. No one would have taken her for a bride. The few who noticed them wondered at her marvelous beauty, and at the silence between them, imagining them to be brother and sister, who were perhaps not on the best of terms. Herman was most kind and attentive. He had provided plenty of papers and magazines; and these he arranged for her. He waited upon her assiduously, yet always without intruding, always without in the least degree trenching on the distance she had placed between them.

It was night when they reached Dover, and the stars were shining on the sea. He persuaded her to rest for an hour at the Lord Warden. There was time for her to take supper before starting; and he busied himself in seeing that all was as she would like it. He waited on her every wish; and then, when the time for starting had arrived, they walked down the pier together. She noticed that he did not offer her his arm; even when they had reached the steps he stood aside while someone else rendered her assistance.

It was a glorious night, with a sweet soft wind blowing, and the golden stars gleaming in the depths of the sky. The sea was calm as a lake—there was hardly a ripple on its surface—and the moon was rising like a silver crescent in the sky.

They walked up and down the deck, watching the fast-receding shore, watching the stars reflected in the waves, until nearly an hour had passed—they having talked not unpleasantly—and then Herman thought of his wife's fatigue.

"You have had a hard day's traveling, Lady Ianthe," he said; "will you not go to your cabin and rest?"

She looked up into his face and laughed.

"You do not yet know my whims and caprices," she said. "I never care to enter those close stifling cabins. A night on deck is my greatest delight."

"Then I must find you a comfortable sheltered seat, and plenty of wraps," he returned.

"Thank you; my maid will do that."

Seeing him draw back with a saddened face, she added:

"Perhaps you will manage it better, though. I shall be glad if you will attend to it."

He looked delighted, and hastened to obey.

"He is really so kind," said Lady Ianthe, as though excusing her scant courtesy to herself, "that I cannot be angry."

He made for her a pleasant little nook, sheltered from the wind; and she was compelled to own that she was very comfortable.

"You are quite sure," he said, "that you will not take cold?"

"No, there is no fear."

And then he stood for a few moments thoughtfully by her side.

"Ianthe," he said, "if, in our strange life there is to be any degree of comfort, we must be perfectly straightforward. It will give me the greatest pleasure to sit here with you; but I am afraid of presuming. If you would rather be alone, tell me so."

"I would rather be alone," she said.

If he felt any pain at her words, he would not betray it to her. He held out his hand, and then, remembering his agreement, drew it suddenly back again.

"Good night," he said—"good night, and Heaven bless you!"

She had forgotten all about him before he had been five minutes away from her. He crossed to the other side of the vessel, and sat where he could see her without being seen.

The first few days of their travels passed happily enough. The novelty charmed her, his kindness and at-

tention pleased her—indeed his attention was something wonderful. He never seemed to forget her—her least wish, her slightest desire, her faintest caprice, were all gratified before she had hardly expressed them. He never spoke to her of love—he never spoke to her of himself—but he surrounded her with an atmosphere of affectionate care which soon became indispensable to her. She began to rely upon him for the comfort of her life—but, as for loving him, the idea did not even occur to her.

They went wherever she expressed a wish to go. She saw Rome, Venice, Naples, Palermo. She revelled in the new and entrancing life. Her husband, too, when she could forget that he was her husband—when she could forget that he was a plebeian—was a most intelligent companion. His store of information bewildered her—dazzled her; he seemed to know the history of every picture and statue, of every place of interest; he knew something of the lives of all great men.

They went one lovely morning in June to visit an old picture-gallery in Venice. Amongst the paintings was one entitled "An Unhappy Marriage." There was a young wife with a sweet, fair, patient face, and fair waving hair—a sad face, never forgotten when once seen, with the most plaintive expression—watching the sleep of her husband, a young man, handsome, dissipated, with flushed countenance and tangled hair. There was a world of regret in the woman's eyes, a history in the sweet, hopeless face. Herman drew Lady Ianthe away.

"Do not look at it," he said, hastily—"I do not like it."

"But I do," she opposed. "Why do you not?"

"It is too painful a reminder," he replied; and she laughed.

"It does not concern us—ours is not a case of disappointment. I do not think we are disappointed in each other; ours was not so much a marriage you know as a mere business arrangement. Why should the picture affect you?"

He turned from her with a sudden moan, as though his pain was greater than he could bear.

He tried to make himself happy. If he had loved her less passionately, it would not have been so difficult. He tried to engross himself in the scenes around him; he purchased all that was most beautiful and that he fancied she would like—cameos, laces, *bijouterie* of all kinds. If she admired a statue, and he could not obtain the original, he would order a copy; it was the same with pictures. Whatever she admired—if money could purchase it for her, she had it. He sent home such hosts of treasures to Croombe that the Earl was startled.

They met many English people abroad. Lady Ianthe had quite ceased to shun such meetings. She had ceased to remember that there was any peculiarity in her relations with her husband. She was generally quite unembarrassed with him, so that the presence of strangers made little or no difference to them. No remark was ever made about them—no one ever said they were attached to each other—no one ever said the reverse; they were universally admired and courted. And, as yet, Herman was full of hope. She would not always be so cold to him, so proud and stately. She would be compelled

to love him, and however hard it might be, he would wait with patience until that day. He longed at times for a kind word from her—he longed to hear her voice soften into that sweet and tender cadence that she used always in speaking of her father. It would come—it must come! Such love as his must win its reward sooner or later. A day would come when she would draw near to him, saying, "I love you, husband, at last;" and in that dream he tried to find peace and content.

CHAPTER X.

THEY were coming home—the wedding tour had been unduly prolonged. Lady Ianthe had seemed to be enjoying herself so thoroughly that Herman did not care to put the longing of his heart into words, and ask her to go home. She would never care for him abroad; he consoled himself by thinking that she was too much absorbed and engrossed in the novelties around her. But at home, at Croombe, where his love would surround her, where she would have leisure to think of him, there she would learn to love him. Still, he himself would never have suggested their returning. To his great delight, when the month of July came, with its dazzling glory of flowers and its fervid heats, she told her husband that it was time they thought of going home.

"We shall find Croombe at its fairest," she said. "It

is always beautiful, but it is most so when the fulness of summer is over it." And then she added, gracefully, "It is to be your home, I remember. I hope that you will like it." She did not add, "and that you will be happy there." He noticed the omission, but he had determined to be hopeful.

It was a lovely evening in July when they once more reached the Abbey. It seemed to Ianthe that there had never been such sunshine—never such a glow of color, such warm, sweet fragrance.

"Italy was beautiful," she said to her husband, "but in the whole world there is no place like home."

"Do you like Croombe so much?" he asked, gently.

The tears shone in her proud eyes as she answered:

"Yes, I love it inexpressibly."

And then he thought to himself that, whether she ever loved him or not, he would be content, for he had given her this great happiness—he had preserved her home. He would have done twice as much to hear such words from the lips he loved.

It was a pretty home-coming. There were arches of evergreens and flowers, each one surmounted with the word "Welcome." There were pretty colored flags and bowers with inscriptions of welcome—there was a crowd of tenantry and children.

Lady Ianthe's beautiful face flushed; it was so strangely sweet to her, this welcome from those she had lived amongst and loved. The sun was setting over the trees, the rich rippling foliage was gently stirred by the sweet south wind, the air was balmy with the fragrance of

flowers: it seemed as though even nature had donned her fairest robe to bid them welcome.

The old Earl was in the grand entrance-hall, and Lady Ianthe looked at him with incredulous delight. His eyes were bright, the worn, haggard look of pain had left his face, he was more erect, more stately. She had not seen him looking so well for years. With a joyful cry she threw her arms round his neck.

"Papa," she said, delightedly, "it does my heart good to see you again."

The Earl looked at his daughter, and was delighted with her improved appearance, her increased beauty; he could hardly take his eyes from the radiant face. Suddenly he remembered Herman, waiting for his welcome!

"My daughter," he said with graceful courtesy, "we must not forget to whom we owe all our happiness. My son, a hundred welcomes home!"

Then he watched Lady Ianthe as she went over the beautiful house. The improvements made therein during her absence had all been suggested by her husband, and superintended by the Earl.

Lord Carre had had but little to spend on Croombe; Herman, however, had had new stables erected, and, what was better, filled with some of the finest horses in the county. A new wing had been added to the Abbey, and it had been fitted up with every modern appliance. There were new conservatories, and the grounds had been put into perfect order. The interior of the house had been almost entirely refurnished.

In the picture-gallery Lady Ianthe saw again the pictures and statues that had gladdened her eyes in other

lands. Thither had been brought, as though by magic, all that she had most admired. All was owing to the untiring love, the unwearied devotion, the generosity of the husband who had been forbidden to speak even one affectionate word to her. He was not even by her side now—he would not detract from his munificence by seeming to want her thanks. It was the Earl who showed her everything.

"What do we not owe him, Ianthe?" he said at length.

She did not love her husband; she looked down upon him from the serene height of her nobility. But she was not deficient in gratitude.

"We owe him thanks," she said at last, "and he shall have them."

She went at once in search of him, and found him alone in the pretty morning-room, where she had given her contemptuous assent to being his wife.

Was he thinking of that, she wondered—of her scornful, bitter words—her unutterable disdain? Her face flushed crimson as she remembered it all.

She went up to him—he was standing leaning against the open glass door—and it struck her with sudden pain how lonely he looked amidst all this happiness of their home coming; there was something of sad depression in his face, something of sorrow and pain in his eyes.

He looked up as she entered, so evidently in search of him, with a sudden gleam of light and hope on his face. Was it going to be realized, this dream of his? Had she come to say, "I love you, husband—I love you at last?"

She was coming to him, with a smile on her face sweeter than any he had ever seen there before.

"Herman," she said, "I come to thank you. You are very good—very generous. I thank you with my whole heart and soul for all your kindness; you have made us very happy."

He had advanced eagerly to meet her, his heart on his lips, his soul in his eyes, his hands outstretched; but, when he heard what she had to say, hope died within him, his eager hands fell.

"I am glad that you are pleased," he said, quietly, "and that you approve of what I have done."

She looked up at him in wonder; his voice was full of pain, of disappointment, and the look on his face was pitiful to see. What had he expected? What did he think she had come to say? She drew back with a crimson flush, and then tried to laugh her unspoken questions away.

"I have run away from papa to find and thank you. You have guessed exactly what would please me. You understand that I am very grateful to you?"

"I understand, Lady Ianthe," he said, gravely; and then silence fell over them.

"I will go back to papa," she said, presently. "Will you come with me? He is so pleased to show me all the marvelous changes."

"I think you will enjoy yourself better in my absence," he replied.

"We dine at eight," said Lady Ianthe, as she slowly walked away.

He had kept to the very letter of the agreement; he

had not whispered one affectionate word. She would have been very angry had he done so. But she did wish that he had not looked so lonely—that he had not spoken with such pain in his voice; for, after all, they owed so much to him—he was so good and so kind.

The met again at dinner. Lady Ianthe had much to tell the Earl of the people she had met, the places she had seen, the pleasures, gayeties, and amusements of the trip. She was all brightness and animation. After dinner her husband said to her:

"I have been delighted to listen to your conversation. I am so pleased that you enjoyed the tour."

"Did you not know it?" she asked.

"No," he replied. "You forget that you never told me whether you were enjoying yourself or not—in fact, I do not know that you ever spoke to me of yourself."

"Then I will make amends now," she said, with a smile. "I did enjoy my tour very much indeed."

"It was not spoilt by the fact of my being with you?" he interrogated.

"No, it was not," she replied.

"In fact, that was a matter of indifference—a circumstance hardly worth thought?"

"If you will press for the truth," she said proudly, "it was a matter of indifference; yet I thank you for all your kind attention. But we need not bandy words with each other on this first night of our return. If all business arrangements went on as satisfactorily as ours, it would be a happier world."

He drew a step nearer to her and looked into her face.

"Ianthe," he said, sadly, "you like to humiliate me.

You like to call our marriage a business arrangement. In all matters of business the benefit is supposed to be equal. Will you think for one minute, and then tell me what I have gained?"

The words struck her. He had given them his fortune, his name, his service. What had he gained?

"You made the compact of your own free will," she said.

"I grant it, but it is hardly fair to speak of it as business, Lady Ianthe."

"Then," she said, soothingly, "if the expression does not please you, if it hurts you, I promise never to use it again."

It was the first little concession that she had made him, and he was delighted. He forgot her pride, her *hauteur*, the hard words that had preceded it. He remembered only that for the first time she had considerably given in to his wish, and his delight knew no bounds.

"She will be mine yet!" he thought. "She will love me, and tell me so. This is the beginning of the end."

CHAPTER XI.

Honors fell thickly on Herman not many weeks after his return. The Lord Lieutenant of the county had died, and with general approval he was chosen to take

his place. There was a rumor of a general election; and it was certain that if he chose he could be returned by an overwhelming majority. There had never been a more popular man in the county. The neighbors, rich and poor, had fallen into the habit of calling him "Squire." There was no one so popular, so beloved, so courted, so esteemed, as the "Squire" and his lady. In his public life he was happy, but in his home life he was compelled to own himself a bitterly disappointed man.

They had been at home for some time, and he seemed further than ever from winning the least sign of love or affection from his proud, beautiful young wife. Every day gave him greater proof of her complete indifference, of the cruel distance that parted them.

One morning toward the end of September, husband and wife were together in the morning-room. Herman had a liking for that room—whether it was because of the interview that had taken place there he could not tell. On this morning he sat reading his newspaper, while Lady Ianthe went to attend to her favorite flowers in the adjoining conservatory. She had with her a little basket for the dead leaves, and a pair of scissors. Herman watched in silence the beautiful face bent over the fragrant blossoms. Suddenly he was startled by an exclamation of sharp pain from Lady Ianthe. He went instantly to see what was the cause. She held up her hand.

"See what I have done!" she cried.

He saw a small deep wound in one of her fingers.

"What has caused that?" he asked.

"I was removing a stubborn thorn," she replied, "and I have cut my finger."

He saw that her lips had grown pale, for blood was flowing freely from the wound.

"What shall I do?" she asked.

"I have some court-plaster," he replied. "It is not a severe wound; this will check the bleeding."

He produced his pocket-book, took out a little packet containing court-plaster, and carefully cut off a slip. He held it out to her.

"I cannot put it on myself," she said.

"Shall I call your maid, then, Lady Ianthe?"

She looked at him in supreme wonder.

"No; why not put it on yourself, Herman?"

"You forget the contract not to touch your hand."

"Never mind the contract in a case of this kind," she rejoined quickly.

And for the second time in his life he held Lady Ianthe's hand in his own.

Gently and tenderly he bound up the pretty wounded finger.

"Does it pain you now?" he asked.

"Not much," she replied. "Thank you."

But for a minute longer he held her hand, looking at it intently.

"My wife's hand," he said—"the hand that holds my heart, my love, my life—the hand that has never yet lain willingly in mine. May I kiss it, Ianthe, before I let it go?"

"Yes," she replied, her face flushing, "if it pleases you."

He bent down and kissed it with such love, such passion, that the kiss burned her like flame; then, without another word, he quitted the room.

"What a sad thing it is that he is of low birth!" said Lady Ianthe to herself. "There is something really pleasant about him."

All day the memory of that kiss was with her. The hand he had caressed seemed to burn her. More than once she caught herself remembering how his eyes had shone and his lips had trembled—what passion and what pain there had been in his face. She began to reflect deeply. Her life was one round of self-indulgence, of gayety, flattery, and pleasure; while a noble heart lay under her feet—a heart that she crushed at every step.

One morning it seemed to her that something unusual had occurred; the servants looked tired, and some of them were absent. Her maid told her that during the night the Earl had been seized with a sudden fainting-fit; they had hastily summoned the Squire, whose first care was that Lady Ianthe should not be disturbed. He had sent off at once for the doctor, and had sat up himself during the whole night. The Earl was better—almost well, in fact; the attack had been but trifling. Yet the Squire had never left him, but had tended him with the love and devotion of a son, his only anxiety being that his wife should be spared all care and trouble.

"Where is Mr. Carre now?" she asked.

They told her he had fallen asleep on the couch in the morning-room. She went in quietly. There was a little stand by his side, and on it stood her favorite lemon-plant. She broke off a spray as she stood watch-

ing him, and bruised it in her white fingers. How pale and worn he looked! How handsome his face was in its repose—the lips so firm, the rich clustering hair falling over the broad brow. Had he been of her order, she would have called him princely. One arm was thrown above his head; and she stood silently watching him. He did not look like a happy man. There were great lines of pain on his face which told of many weary hours.

Not happy? Her heart smote her as she looked at him. How he loved her! How he had lavished most royal gifts upon her! He had given her his wealth, name, love, everything—had sunk his very identity—and all for love of her. What had he gained? Not a loving look or a kindly word.

"Poor fellow!" she murmured to herself. She bent over him, with more tenderness in her heart than she had ever felt before. She heard him murmur in his sleep:

"Ianthe, my love, my wife—so cold, so cruel!"

A deep sigh that was almost a moan came from his lips. She bent still lower, and the bruised lemon-spray fell from her hands on to his breast.

"Poor fellow!" she murmured again, and with a sudden impulse she touched his hair. It was the first time she had voluntarily gone near him or touched him. Was it Paradise opening to him in his dreams?

Suddenly he stirred in his sleep, and she hastened away. Her face burned at the thought that he should wake and find her there. She quitted the room, and he opened his eyes with a confused sense of her presence.

He saw the folds of her white dress as she closed the door behind, and he found the lemon spray on his breast.

CHAPTER XII.

A YEAR and more had passed since the Squire and Lady Ianthe had returned home. Everything had fallen into its usual routine, so that it seemed difficult to imagine that any dark trouble had loomed over the Abbey. The only perceptible difference was the presence of the Squire and the great increase in luxury. By this time the whole county had some knowledge of the terms on which the Squire and Lady Ianthe lived. The general decision was that Lady Ianthe had married for money, and the Squire for the sake of the aristocratic union.

When the Squire and his wife went up to London for the season, Lady Ianthe reigned there—the leading belle of the day. Their house was the most popular in the great city: they were the leaders almost everywhere. It was some little comfort to Herman to find that, although she did not love him—did not care for him—she was equally indifferent to every one else. Her proud, serene calm seemed never to be broken.

Then he was returned a member for the county; and it struck him that she was pleased at his success. He flung himself heart and soul into his new duties—he tried

to fill his life with them. But there was always the same dreary sense of desolation, the same heartache, and the same longing for love. Then, when the season was ended, they returned to Croombe. He began to abandon hope after that. His wife's well-bred indifference became unbearable.

Everything had fallen into its usual routine. Lady Ianthe spent her time with the Earl, and in receiving and returning hospitality, or amusing herself with books, music, and flowers. She was always kind to her husband in a certain indifferent fashion. She deferred on every occasion to his authority. He was treated by the Earl's wish, as master of the house. His position was a magnificent one, but his heart ached for love, and no love came. The woman whom he worshipped so passionately would never care for him. She had no heart; she was too proud to love, too haughty to care for anything but her own self-indulgence and her name.

It came to him with a sickening sense of certainty at last. He did not regret what he had done. For her sake he would have done it all over again. But his manhood rose now in hot rebellion against his fate. She could live happily enough without him, but he could live no longer by her side. He had suffered enough. She was welcome, doubly welcome, to all he had in the world, but he could no longer bear the pain and torment of her presence. His resolve was taken; he must go. They were wedded, it was true, but they must part. He had come to the limit of his patience. If she needed him he would remain; but she did not. His absence could make no possible difference to her life.

There was no need for any scandal, for any explanation—no need that any human being should know the truth as to why he had gone. He would go to America. He had money invested there, and he could say business called him thither; the best thing for which he could hope and pray was that Heaven in its mercy would let him die there. One morning he sent for Ianthe—he was in his favorite room. She smiled when she saw him there.

"You like this room, Herman," she said.

"I had my first hope of love here," he answered. "Ianthe, I have sent for you here to speak to you—here, where without love, you promised to be my wife, and I, trusting in the might of my own love to win yours, took upon myself a task that was superhuman."

The gravity of his voice and manner awed her. She sat down and looked at him wistfully. Surely everything was going on well. What did he want?

"Ianthe," continued the grave, passionate voice, "have I not done all that man could do to win your love?"

"Yes," she replied, "I own that you have."

"Yet you no more love me now than you did on the day that I first spoke to you here."

"There can be no question of love between you and me," she observed, haughtily. "Why are you not content to live as hitherto?"

"Why am I not content?" he cried, passionately. "Because I am not made of marble or ice—because I have a living human heart that longs for love, a soul that

cries out against my cruel life, my cruel solitude—because I can bear my life no longer!"

"Why, what is wrong?" she asked, startled by the passion in his voice.

"Ask me, rather, what is right? I love you so entirely, so devotedly, that I must win your love in return, or I must go from you. Can you place your hand in mine, and say, 'I will try to love you, Herman?' Even that will content me."

Her beautiful face had grown strangely pale. She drew back.

"No," she replied, in a low voice, "I cannot."

He laughed aloud, and she shrank, scared and frightened, from the sound.

"No, you cannot; this plebeian hand of mine must not touch the dainty fingers of Lady Carre!"

"Herman," she interposed, "you frighten me. I do not understand you in this mood."

"I beg your pardon," he said, growing calmer at the sound of her voice. "I am at times frightened at myself. I believe that my great misery is driving me mad. I will try to say to you in sad and sober earnestness what I mean. I am very unhappy. I would bear it all if there were any chance of ever winning your love; but there is none, and I cannot remain here any longer. I have borne more than a man should bear, because I have always thought time would win me your love. Now I see that it never will."

"But where will you go? What will you do?" she asked, gently.

"I will do nothing that shall attract scandal or gossip

—nothing that shall annoy you, or any one else. I have money invested in America—I will go and look after it. It will be known that I have gone on business, and nothing more will be said."

"Shall you remain in America?" she asked.

"I hope Heaven will be merciful and let me die there; then you will be free."

"I do not know that I want to be free," she said.

"Then will you love me, Ianthe?"

"No, no. Oh, Herman, be sensible and let us remain as we are."

"No, I will be a slave no longer, Lady Ianthe. One word from you and I will remain. Ianthe, you see how madly I love you."

"Then why do you go?" she asked.

"Because, though I can bear my great sorrow away from you, I cannot bear to live any longer in your presence without your love. Do you think that I am stone and marble—that I never wish you to kiss me? What would I not give, Ianthe, for one voluntary kiss from your lips? But I shall never have it—never! Do you think I never long to clasp your hands in mine—to hear your voice whisper sweet words to me?"

"I do not know," she replied.

"But I know, Ianthe. And I can bear the torture no longer. There is one thought that has haunted me ever since I have been here. Can you guess what it is?"

"No," she said.

"I will tell you. It is that you would come to me with love shining in your eyes—that you would clasp your arms round my neck, and say, 'My husband, I

have learned to love you at last!" Will such imagination ever become reality, Ianthe?"

"No," she replied, faintly, "I do not think it will."

"Then I must say, Heaven bless you, wife. You and I must part; and for your sake, Ianthe, I pray that we may never meet again."

CHAPTER XIII.

His departure made some little stir. The papers all agree that it was sad to lose the promising young member, just when the country required his services. The Earl was loud in his lamentations—indeed, when Herman told him that he contemplated a journey to America, the old man broke down, and prayed him, with tears, not to go away.

"You are to me like my own child," he said. "If I had had a son of my own I should not have loved him better. Why go so far away?"

Herman, deeply touched by such affection, answered something about money; but Lord Carre grew impatient.

"Money!" he cried. "What does such money matter to you? If you lost all that there is in America belonging to you, it would not matter."

But Herman gravely told him it must be—he was

compelled to go. In his distress the Earl sent for his daughter.

"Ianthe," he pleaded, "can you not ask Herman to stay? I cannot bear that he should leave us; ask him to stay."

She knew that one word from her would make him give up all thought of the journey; but that one word she would not speak. Still, her father's sorrow opened her eyes as nothing else could have done, and made her think more of her husband than she had thought before. He comforted the Earl; but to himself he said it was more than probable that he should never see Croombe Abbey again.

The morning came when he stood before his wife, his preparations all made, his farewells all spoken.

"I am here to say good-by, Ianthe."

She looked up in amazement.

"Are you going to-day—now? I did not know it."

"Yes, I am going. I leave my heart and my love with you, Ianthe. I pray Heaven to watch over you."

She held out her hand silently. She was nearer caring for him than she had ever been.

"Ianthe," he said, in a low voice, "I am looking for the last time, in the eyes that have always held happiness for me. I forget the pride, the scorn, the anguish, and my heart goes out to you in farewell—farewell, my lost love—my idolized wife! Will you kiss me once—only once? I shall never suffer a greater bitterness than this. Will you kiss me, Ianthe?"

She turned her beautiful face to his—her perfumed hair brushed his cheek. She touched him with her

sweet fresh lips. She saw him grow white as death, and then, with a passionate cry, hurry away. Then she was standing alone, with a strange fire creeping slowly through her veins, and a strange tempest breaking over her heart—wondering what had happened.

Two days afterward a packet was placed in her hand. She recognized his writing, and opened the missive at once. Hot tears filled her eyes as she gazed. It was a deed of gift, making over to her the greater part of his fortune. He had reserved but a small share for himself —and even that was to be hers at his death. His wealth was made over to her without the least reservation. It was plain that he thought that, when freed from him by the death he sought, she would marry in her own rank; but there was not one word of this in the deed of gift.

She was touched more deeply than she cared to own. Who could say, after such love and sublime devotion, that noble souls belonged alone to men of noble birth? There had never been a more noble soul than this.

What had he not done for love of her? He had rescued the name she bore from shame and disgrace—he had saved her father from something more than ruin—he had restored their family fortunes with the greatest splendor—he had taken her name, and had added a new lustre to it—he had devoted himself to her service and to her father's and he had crowned his gifts by the lavish one of his whole fortune. Had there ever been love like his?

Plebeian! She blushed to think how often the word had been applied to him. He might be lowly born, but his was the soul of a prince. Lady Ianthe, with all her

pride, was too noble, too grand in character, not to recognize the true nobility he had displayed.

He was gone. She would have liked to see him once more—to hold out her hands to him in all frankness, and say:

"I have misjudged you—misprized you. I have learned to recognize in you, at last, a nobility greater far than the mere accident of birth confers."

She would have said it, but words were useless now. She took the deed to her father, who read it through, and then said, sadly:

"I do not like this, Ianthe—it seems to me that he never expects to return. My daughter, I am an old man, and my experience of this world has been a large one. I tell you that a nobler man than this husband of yours has never lived."

She added, in a low voice, "I believe it." Come what might, she could despise him no more—he had proved himself infinitely her superior.

He was gone. His rooms were closed; there were few traces at Croombe Abbey of the man who had rescued it from ruin. But he lived in the hearts of the tenants. The servants spoke of him in whispers to each other, saying that their beautiful young mistress had been very proud, but that she would repent her pride now that it had driven him away. When Lady Ianthe went amongst the tenantry, she wondered to find how greatly he was loved. There was nothing but lamentation about him.

He had been gone three years. During that time he wrote often to the Earl, but rarely to Lady Ianthe. From

every land through which he traveled he sent presents to Lord Carre. He seemed never to forget him; but his letters to Lady Ianthe breathed only one idea, and that was an apology that he still lived.

Slowly, but surely, she began to miss him—to miss his devotion, the constant protection of his presence, his assiduous attention. When she went out now she had no loving escort; no strong loving hands were near; no one was present to consult her every whim and caprice. If she felt tired, there was no one to persuade her to rest, to insist that she should take care of herself, to shield her from every little passing care. She missed the strong, tender, never-failing love, although she was unwilling to own it.

It touched her, too, to the very heart to see how the Earl missed him—he had become so dependent on him for much of the comfort of his life. Herman was so prompt in answering his letters, so skillful in superintending his business affairs, so kind in selecting the newspaper articles he thought would best please him, and reading them to him. The Earl had often told him laughingly that he was eyes and ears to him. Now all that was missing. When Lord Carre had cared to walk, Herman's strong arm had been ready to guide his feeble steps; he had been devoted as a son—and all because he loved Lady Ianthe. Moreover, he had detected that all was not quite as it should be. The property of the estate had never been so well cared for as when he had the management of it.

Slowly but surely all these things came home to Lady Ianthe, and were as the beginning of the end. She had

learned to miss him more than she had learned to despise him. She learned that nobility of character belongs to no estate, but is admirable in all—that to be nobly born is not to have a monopoly of every good gift under heaven—that vice can be hereditary as well as virtue—that virtue can exist without either rank or wealth. All these lessons she learned slowly, and learned too late.

In the long gallery hung a portrait of Herman. The Earl had insisted on having it there; and more than once a day Lady Ianthe would go to look at it—to look in silence at the face that for love of her had grown so thin and worn—to look at that pictured semblance of the man whom her pride and comtempt had driven into exile that he hoped would end in death.

It was a beautiful face; its beauty grew upon her. She wondered that she could ever have undervalued it—have thought it plain or plebeian. No peer of the realm had a more noble face. Ah, how full of pain and sorrow it had been when she had seen it last! How those eyes had saddened and those lips trembled! How cruel she had been to him!

So time passed; and then Wyndham Carre paid his long delayed visit to Croombe Abbey. She had despised her husband because he was a commoner; she had refused to believe that great merit of true nobility could belong to a man not nobly born; she had treated him with coldness and contempt. Now she was to behold a man whose chief merit lay in what she valued so highly—noble birth. He prided himself upon it; he looked upon his inferiors in station as people belonging to another world; he treated them with insolent contempt.

He talked of his order until Lady Ianthe's face grew crimson; it was as though she saw herself in a glass.

Wyndham Carre spoke with a lisp—and he never forgot himself or his own good looks. Yet he was a brave officer, and a good soldier. One of the first things he did at Croombe was to injure a child as he was galloping along the high-road. True, it was an accident, but he had flung gold at the mother's feet when she came to pick up the little one, and had uttered no kindly word to her. When spoken to afterward about it, he said that people of that kind had little feeling; they had no wounds so deep but that money could heal them—gold was their sovereign remedy.

Lady Ianthe contrasted such behavior with the tender charity that had characterized Herman in all his dealings with the poor. Which was worthier of admiration—the man of birth or the commoner?

Again, it never occurred to Wyndham Carre to exert himself to render the least service to the Earl. If Lord Carre expressed a wish for anything, the younger man would, if near the bell, ring it and summon a servant; if the old Earl longed for the help of a kindly arm, his relative would raise his handsome eyebrows and say:

"'Pon my honor, I regret that I was not cut out for the domestic virtues."

He was too indolent to read aloud, too careless to write letters, too indifferent to interest himself in matters pertaining to Croombe; and, again contrasting such selfishness with the never-failing solicitude of her husband, Lady Ianthe asked herself which was the nobler of the two?

In the first excitement of seeing his kinsman again, the Earl had confided to him the story of his difficulties and his wonderful rescue. One of the bitterest trials of Lady Ianthe's life was to hear Wyndham Carre sneer about it. "Our good friend the tradesman" was his designation for the man who had done so much. "Where did our excellent friend the tradesman find this good taste?" he would ask. And, when he had heard the whole story of Herman's generosity, he said, insolently:

"It was an impertinent thing of him to come to the rescue of a family like ours."

On hearing this speech, Lady Ianthe's face flamed with indignation, and her heart beat with anger. She turned to him abruptly.

"You would not have done it," she said.

"No, my dear lady. I confess to a preference for number one."

"You have five thousand pounds, but you would not give them to save my father from ruin, would you?"

"Since you press the question, certainly not," he replied, with a laugh.

"I knew it," she declared; "and, if you had found that my father had made use of your five thousand pounds, you would have compelled him to repay it."

"I am afraid necessity would have left me no choice. We cannot all be as munificent as our good friend the tradesman. It is not given to us all to have the privilege of making money."

"The tradesman, as you choose to call him, is a thousand times nobler than you are!" she cried, indignantly.

"My dear Ianthe, you forget what you are saying,"

he said, raising his eyebrows. "That kind of man could not be noble if he tried."

And again she asked herself which gained by contrast—the plebeian or her kinsman?

She could not help noticing, too, that the poor and the dependent who had so dearly loved and so generously praised her husband did not like Wyndham Carre. He had a habit of treating his inferiors with insolence, not unmarked by contempt. He gave his orders to servants with the air of a tyrant; he scolded and stormed if things did not please him. He was little loved in the household, yet he was nobly born.

"When will the Squire come back?" people began to ask. He had been gone three years now, and in his letters he said no word about returning. Lady Ianthe knew that he would never return—that he would remain in exile until death freed him. She for whose sake he had exiled himself—she whose pride had driven him from home—knew why he had gone, and knew also that he would never return. Yet it was some time before she owned to herself that her opinions about him were changing. That which his constant presence, his unremitting love, his entire devotion, had failed to excite, his absence and her thoughts of him aroused.

Then came the time in which she was to experience the gradual dawning of love in her heart. Wonderful news came to Croombe—so wonderful that it was difficult to realize it. The silver mine was to turn out an El Dorado at last. A clever and enterprising Englishman had examined it, and believed that it would pay to work it, and his prognostication turned out to be true. Slowly, but

surely, the mine recovered itself; once more the shares were at a premium; once more the hapless shareholders began to look for a golden future—and this time the dream was not vain.

"They tell me," said Wyndham Carre to the Earl, "that the mine will shortly pay twenty per cent., and will most probably pay more. I wish my money were invested in it."

Lord Carre listened with a shudder. What had happened to that money before, and where was the man who had saved him?

But it was to Lady Ianthe that Wyndham spoke most openly.

"It is like a romance," he said—"first to lose a fortune and then to regain it. Why, Ianthe, you will be one of the wealthiest women in England! What a pity it is that you hampered yourself with that good tradesman of yours! You might have been a duchess."

"Perhaps I prefer him to a duke," she rejoined angrily.

"Nonsense! Of course, now the thing is done, and there is no help for it, you are wise in making the best of it; but it is really a great pity that you were sacrificed to him."

She turned away, too indignant for words. How many times had she thought the same thing? Now to hear it told abruptly in words was torture. She went away and stood by the old sun-dial in the garden, thinking of him. Poor fellow? All his sacrifices had been in vain. He would hear now that even the fortune he had lavished upon them was given for nothing—it was not wanted.

Lady Ianthe thought long and mournfully of him; and then she started on finding her face wet with tears. She, one of the proudest women in England, to weep for the plebeian husband whose love she had so completely scorned! Could it be possible? She laid her face on the mossy sun-dial.

If she could only see him—only see his face, with his passionate eyes looking into her own—only hear the voice that had always been so low and gentle for her! If she might but see him again, and tell him that his dream had come true—that she was ready to clasp her arms around his neck and say that she loved him at last!

Did she love him? Her face flushed, her heart beat, her hands tightened their clasp. Love him. Yes! For he had the soul of a prince, this lowly-born yet noble husband of hers. And she loved him at last with all her heart. Should she write and tell him so? Ah, no! That was a different matter.

CHAPTER XIV.

THREE years had sped by, and Ianthe had developed into a magnificently beautiful woman. Wyndham Carre often told her there was no one in England to equal her.

"It is such a great pity," he would say, "that you should be hampered with this horrible marriage. What is he like, this worthy young tradesman who is content to leave one of the loveliest women in England, while he looks after his money in America?"

"You do not know why he went away," she said.

He laughed with an air of great amusement.

"Upon my word, Ianthe," he said, "I believe that you sent him away yourself because you were ashamed of him."

"I am not ashamed of him—he is the noblest man I have ever met."

"Not now, perhaps; but he would never stay away all this time unless you had ordered it. What is he doing? My leave of absence will have expired before he returns, so I shall not see him."

"He will not lose much by that," retorted Lady Ianthe. "You will—for you might take a lesson in good manners from him with great advantage."

"I shall begin to think that I have been mistaken, and that you are in love with our good friend after all."

"Should not a wife be in love with her husband?" she asked.

"I suppose so; but rumor says he failed to win your love."

"Then rumor speaks falsely," she said, angrily.

And then she thought bitterly of what she had exposed him to—of the sneers and taunts and ridicule—this chivalrous man who had laid his heart at her feet.

But the time was coming when even the mocking laughter of Wyndham Carre should be hushed, and he would speak of Herman without a sneer.

It was summer time, and a letter came from New York, written by a stranger's hand, telling how Herman Carre lay sick unto death, and that there was little or no hope for him. He had wished that his friends should know. Not that he intended or desired to disturb them; they were not to make any attempt to see him or send to him—it would be useless, for it would be too late. He had purposely refrained from sending his address, so that they might make no vain search for him. Even Wyndham's sneers were hushed as he heard that letter read.

There was inclosed a note for Lady Ianthe. She took it to her own room—she could not open it before others. When she had broken the seal to her great surprise there fell from the note a faded spray of lemon-plant. And then she read:

"Ianthe, my darling wife—I dare to write to tell you once more what is passing in my heart, for I believe that my prayers are heard, and that I am dying at last. Oh, Ianthe, once, only once more let me tell you how I love you! I have been wandering now for several years,

yet my heart beats at the memory of your face, at the thought of you, at the sound of your name, with a love as wild and as fierce as ever. For at times I utter your name aloud. Oh, my darling wife, you will never know how I have loved you!

"Looking back, I see that I was presumptuous. Believe me, I loved you so much that I was blind to everything except the one wild hope of winning you. I thought you would forget caste prejudices—that time would soften them—that my great devotion would win your affection. Now I see that that hope was all in vain—utterly vain; the distance between us was too great to be bridged over—you could not care for me, Ianthe. It was all my fault. I reproach myself most bitterly that I did not accede to your request—that I did not, like a generous man, help Lord Carre, and refrain from making your love the reward. I was selfish to do it; I can see it now. I repent with a bitter repentance. A woman's love should never be made a reward for service rendered. Ianthe, it was my great love that made me so selfish. Will you forgive me! I wish I had acted differently. I should at least have had your esteem—now I have nothing.

"I have been very unhappy during these three years—unhappy, because I saw that my folly had darkened your life. Oh, my wife, I pray to Heaven that you may be happy yet—that when I am gone you may meet with some one whom you can love—some one who will make you happy. I pray that you may retain but one memory, and that may be of my great love. Forget all else—forget that I failed in generosity, forget that I was pre-

sumptuous—forget everything—except that I loved you truly.

"Ianthe, I have been happy once since our fatal marriage—only once—and then I lay, tired and sleeping, in my favorite room. I thought that you stood by me. You bent over me—you touched the hair on my brow—you filled my whole soul with a sweet brooding sense of your presence. When I opened my eyes I fancied that I saw the folds of your dress as the door closed; and, darling, I found lying on my breast this bruised spray of your favorite lemon-plant. Thinking you had left it there, I have guarded it as my greatest treasure ever since; and now I send it to you. If kindly thoughts of me did rise in your heart on that day it will recall them; if not—if indeed it was all a dream, a fancy—burn it. Never mind the kisses and the tears that have covered it.

"Good-by, my sweet wife—my lost, dear love! I have told them to write to you when I am dead."

Here the letter ended abruptly, as though the writer's strength had suddenly failed him. How he loved her! She had wakened to a sense of it at last—a sense of his worth, of his love, of his loss. Her tears fell fast over the letter, over the faded lemon-spray. Oh, if it had but pleased Heaven to let her see him once more—to let her lay her head on his breast and say, "I love you, my husband—I love you at last!"

That could never be now; and as she sat there, with her husband's letter in her hand, there came to Lady Ianthe the knowledge that without him she would never be happy.

But no letter came announcing his death. They did not hear again. They did not know whether he was still ill or recovering. They knew nothing, and suspense became intolerable. It told upon Lady Ianthe. She grew thin and pale—she was always thinking of him. The faded lemon-spray had been placed in a gold locket and lay on her breast. The time had come when every thought was his—when every wish, every desire was to see him again.

Summer and autumn passed—no news came from him. The birds took flight to summer climes, the flowers withered, the leaves fell from the trees, the face of nature changed from gay to grave—winter came, and still no letter from him.

Wyndham Carre was to return to India in February.

"You are anxious, I know, for news from America," he said to his relatives, "but it is long since I have seen an English Christmas; let me have one here at Croombe Abbey before I go."

And, though the Earl was unhappy, though his daughter's heart was almost breaking, they yielded to his wish.

. . . . . .

The bells chimed merrily. It was Christmas-eve. There had not been such a fall of snow for years. It lay so thick and so white that the world seemed half buried in it.

Croombe Abbey was more resplendent than it had ever been before; the interior showed naught but luxury and magnificence. The house was full of happy faces. Lord Carre had spared nothing to gratify his

kinsman's wish for a happy Christmas. He had invited numerous guests, and the old Abbey walls resounded with merriment.

The only sad face there was that of his daughter, Lady Ianthe. The weeks of cruel suspense had worn on, yet no news had come from her husband. He was not dead—of that every one seemed sure; but why did he not write? Once a horrible idea came to her. She found herself wondering whether he fancied that she would be sorry to hear that he still lived.

On this snowy Christmas Eve this idea haunted her; she was haunted, too, by the memory of the Christmas Eve, a few short years ago, when she was so happily unconscious of all care. The music distressed her, the Christmas greeting irritated her, the happy smiling faces grieved her. Where was he who ought to have been master there? She went out, away from the laughter and the song, away from the happy hearts that knew no care; they were not suitable companions for her—she who had sent a noble soul into exile. She went away, and throwing a thick shawl round her, wandered to the conservatory near the morning-room—the place where her husband had kissed her hand, and had bidden her farewell.

She stood there, gazing at the snow, watching the stars in the sky, thinking of him with unutterable longing and unutterable love, when Lord Carre suddenly entered. His manner was hurried and abrupt—he looked confused and unlike himself.

"Ianthe," he said—"here alone on this beautiful Christmas Eve!"

"Yes, it wants Herman, papa, to enable me to enjoy it," she confessed.

"Ay, we want Herman;" and then he laughed a perplexed little laugh. "Ianthe," he added, suddenly, "I should like to know if you are strong enough to bear a great surprise. Someone is waiting to see you."

Herman had entered, and was there, standing by her side, looking at her, with a passion of love in his eyes, with a light in his worn face, holding out his hands to her.

"Ianthe, my wife! Ianthe, my love!" he cried.

She heard the sound of a door closing, and they were alone.

"Ianthe, my darling," he went on, "I could not die until I had seen you once more—until I had heard from your own lips that you had learned to think more kindly of me. Oh, my darling, I sought death on sandy deserts, on burning plains, in dark forests, on trackless seas, but my love for you was so great, so intense, it kept me alive in spite of myself! It made me strong when I would fain have been weak; it has brought me hither thousands of miles, when my own sense and my own fears tell me you can have nothing to say to me. I am haunted by you as man was never haunted."

She laid her hand on his lips.

"You shall not say another word, Herman, until you have heard me—until you know what I have to say. I am bitterly sorry for all my cruelty, my coldness, my pride. I repent of it all. I am, so people say, exceedingly proud. Listen, and believe me, love. I am prouder of being your wife than I am of my title, my

ancestry, and everything else. I am proud because I have won the love of one of the noblest men in the wide world. I am proud that you love me so well, Herman."

The light of a great joy dawned in his face.

"I cannot believe it," he said. "It cannot be true. Are you, my wife, Lady Ianthe, speaking so to me?"

"Yes—I, your wife, am asking you to forgive my pride, my insolence, my folly—to believe that at last I have learned to distinguish true nobility, that my whole soul does homage to you, that my heart is yours for evermore, that nothing but death shall ever part us again."

And then, while the Christmas stars shone in the sky, and the Christmas bells chimed merrily, the great desire of Herman's heart was granted to him. His wife clasped her white arms round his neck and said:

"I have learned to love you, my husband at last!"

OLD CHRISTMAS

By WASHINGTON IRVING

CHRISTMAS.

But is old, old, good old Christmas gone? Nothing but the hair of his good, gray old head and beard left? Well, I will have that, seeing I cannot have more of him.

Hue and Cry after Christmas.

A man might then behold
At Christmas, in each hall
Good fires to curb the cold,
And meat for great and small.
The neighbors were friendly bidden,
And all had welcome true,
The poor from the gate were not chidden
When this old cap was new.

Old Song.

Nothing in England exercises a more delightful spell over my imagination than the lingerings of the holiday customs and rural games of former times. They recall the pictures my fancy used to draw in the May morning of life, when as yet I only knew the world through books, and believed it to be all that poets had painted it; and they bring with them the flavor of those honest days of yore, in which, perhaps, with equal fallacy, I am apt to think the world was more homebred, social, and joyous than at present. I regret to say that they are daily growing more and more faint, being gradually worn away by time,

but still more obliterated by modern fashion. They resemble those picturesque morsels of Gothic architecture which we see crumbling in various parts of the country, partly dilapidated by the waste of ages and partly lost in the additions and alterations of latter days. Poetry, however, clings with cherishing fondness about the rural game and holiday revel from which it has derived so many of its themes, as the ivy winds its rich foliage about the Gothic arch and mouldering tower, gratefully repaying their support by clasping together their tottering remains, and, as it were, embalming them in verdure.

Of all the old festivals, however, that of Christmas awakens the strongest and most heartfelt associations. There is a tone of solemn and sacred feeling that blends with our conviviality, and lifts the spirit to a state of hallowed and elevated enjoyment. The services of the Church about this season are extremely tender and inspiring. They dwell on the beautiful story of the origin of our faith and the pastoral scenes that accompanied its announcement. They gradually increase in fervor and pathos during the season of Advent, until they break forth in full jubilee on the morning that brought peace and good-will to men. I do not know of a grander effect of music on the moral feelings than to hear the full choir and the pealing organ performing a Christmas anthem in a cathedral, and filling every part of the vast pile with triumphant harmony.

It is a beautiful arrangement, also, derived from days of yore, that this festival, which commemorates the announcement of the religion of peace and love, has been made the season for gathering together of family connections, and drawing closer again those bands of kindred hearts which the cares and pleasures and sorrows of the world are continually operating to cast loose; of calling back the children of a family who have launched forth in life and wandered wildly asunder, once more to assemble about the paternal hearth, that rallying-place of the affections, there to grow young and loving again among the endearing mementos of childhood.

There is something in the very season of the year that gives a charm to the festivity of Christmas. At other times we derive a great portion of our pleasures from the mere beauties of Nature. Our feelings sally forth and dissipate themselves over the sunny landscape, and we "live abroad and everywhere."

The song of the bird, the murmur of the stream, the breathing fragrance of spring, the soft voluptuousness of summer, the golden pomp of autumn, earth with its mantle of refreshing green, and heaven with its deep delicious blue and its cloudy magnificence,—all fill us with mute but exquisite delight, and we revel in the luxury of mere sensation. But in the depth of winter, when Nature lies despoiled of every charm and wrapped in her shroud of sheeted snow, we turn for our gratifications to moral sources. The dreariness

and desolation of the landscape, the short gloomy days and darksome nights, while they circumscribe our wanderings, shut in our feelings also from rambling abroad, and make us more keenly disposed for the pleasure of the social circle. Our thoughts are more concentrated; our friendly sympathies more aroused. We feel more sensibly the charm of each other's society, and are brought more closely together by dependence on each other for enjoyment. Heart calleth unto heart, and we draw our pleasures from the deep wells of loving-kindness which lie in the quiet recesses of our bosoms, and which, when resorted to, furnish forth the pure element of domestic felicity.

The pitchy gloom without makes the heart dilate on entering the room filled with the glow and warmth of the evening fire. The ruddy blaze diffuses an artificial summer and sunshine through the room, and lights up each countenance in a kindlier welcome. Where does the honest face of hospitality expand into a broader and more cordial smile, where is the shy glance of love more sweetly eloquent, than by the winter fireside? and as the hollow blast of wintry winds rushes through the hall, claps the distant door, whistles about the casement, and rumbles down the chimney, what can be more grateful than that feeling of sober and sheltered security with which we look round upon the comfortable chamber and the scene of domestic hilarity?

The English, from the great prevalence of

rural habit throughout every class of society, have always been fond of those festivals and holidays, which agreeably interrupt the stillness of country life, and they were, in former days, particularly observant of the religious and social rites of Christmas. It is inspiring, to read even the dry details which some antiquaries have given of the quaint humors, the burlesque pageants, the complete abandonment to mirth and good-fellowship with which this festival was celebrated. It seemed to throw open every door and unlock every heart. It brought the peasant and the peer together, and blended all ranks in one warm, generous flow of joy and kindness. The old halls of castles and manor-houses resounded with the harp and the Christmas carol, and their ample boards groaned under the weight of hospitality. Even the poorest cottage welcomed the festive season with green decorations of bay and holly—the cheerful fire glanced its rays through the lattice, inviting the passengers to raise the latch and join the gossip knot huddled round the hearth beguiling the long evening with legendary jokes and oft-told Christmas tales.

One of the least pleasing effects of modern refinement is the havoc it has made among the hearty old holiday customs. It has completely taken off the sharp touchings and spirited reliefs of these embellishments of life, and has worn down society into a more smooth and polished, but certainly a less characteristic surface. Many of the games and ceremonials of Christ-

mas have entirely disappeared, and, like the sherris sack of old Falstaff, are become matters of speculation and dispute among commentators. They flourished in times full of spirit and lustihood, when men enjoyed life roughly, but heartily and vigorously—times wild and picturesque, which have furnished poetry with its richest materials and the drama with its most attractive variety of characters and manners. The world has become more worldly. There is more of dissipation, and less of enjoyment. Pleasure has expanded into a broader, but a shallower stream, and has forsaken many of those deep and quiet channels where it flowed sweetly through the calm bosom of domestic life. Society has acquired a more enlightened and elegant tone, but it has lost many of its strong local peculiarities, its homebred feelings, its honest fireside delights. The traditionary customs of golden-hearted antiquity, its feudal hospitalities, and lordly wassailings, have passed away with the baronial castles and stately manor-houses in which they were celebrated. They comported with the shadowy hall, the great oaken gallery, and the tapestried parlor, but are unfitted to the light showy saloons and gay drawing-rooms of the modern villa.

Shorn, however, as it is, of its ancient and festive honors, Christmas is still a period of delightful excitement in England. It is gratifying to see that home-feeling completely aroused which holds so powerful a place in

every English bosom. The preparations making on every side for the social board that is again to unite friends and kindred; the presents of good cheer passing and repassing, those tokens of regard and quickeners of kind feelings; the evergreens distributed about houses and churches, emblems of peace and gladness, —all these have the most pleasing effect in producing fond associations and kindling benevolent sympathies. Even the sound of the Waits, rude as may be their minstrelsy, breaks upon the mid-watches of a winter night with the effect of perfect harmony. As I have been awakened by them in that still and solemn hour "when deep sleep falleth upon man," I have listened with a hushed delight, and, connecting them with the sacred and joyous occasion, have almost fancied them into another celestial choir announcing peace and good-will to mankind.

How delightfully the imagination, when wrought upon by these moral influences, turns everything to melody and beauty! The very crowing of the cock, heard sometimes in the profound repose of the country, "telling the night-watches to his feathery dames," was thought by the common people to announce the approach of this sacred festival.

"Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Savior's birth is celebrated,
This bird of dawning singeth all night long;
And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad;
The nights are wholesome—then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, no witch hath power to charm,
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time."

Amidst the general call to happiness, the bustle of the spirits, and stir of the affections which prevail at this period what bosom can remain insensible? It is, indeed, the season of regenerated feeling—the season for kindling not merely the fire of hospitality in the hall, but the genial flame of charity in the heart.

The scene of early love again rises green to memory beyond the sterile waste of years; and the idea of home, fraught with the fragrance of home-dwelling joys, reanimates the drooping spirit, as the Arabian breeze will sometimes waft the freshness of the distant fields to the weary pilgrim of the desert.

Stranger and sojourner as I am in the land, though for me no social hearth may blaze, no hospitable roof throw open its doors, nor the warm grasp of friendship welcome me at the threshold, yet I feel the influence of the season beaming into my soul from the happy looks of those around me. Surely happiness is reflective, like the light of heaven, and every countenance, bright with smiles and glowing with innocent enjoyment, is a mirror transmitting to others the rays of a supreme and ever-shining benevolence. He who can turn churlishly away from contemplating the felicity of his fellow-beings, and can sit down darkling and repining in his loneliness when all around is joyful, may have his moments of strong excitement and selfish gratification, but he wants the genial and social sympathies which constitute the charm of a merry Christmas.

THE STAGE COACH.

Omne bene
Sine pœna
Tempua est ludendi.
Venit hora
Absque mora
Libros deponendi.
—Old Holiday School-Song.

In the preceding paper I have made some general observations on the Christmas festivities of England, and am tempted to illustrate them by some anecdotes of a Christmas passed in the country; in perusing which I would most courteously invite my reader to lay aside the austerity of wisdom, and to put on that genuine holiday spirit which is tolerant of folly and anxious only for amusement.

In the course of a December tour in Yorkshire, I rode for a long distance in one of the public coaches on the day preceding Christmas. The coach was crowded, both inside and out, with passengers who, by their talk, seemed principally bound to the mansions of relations or friends to eat the Christmas dinner. It was loaded also with hampers of game and baskets and boxes of delicacies, and hares hung dangling their long ears about the coachman's box, presents from distant friends for the impending feast. I had three fine rosy-cheeked

school-boys for my fellow-passengers inside, full of the buxom health and manly spirit which I have observed in the children of this country. They were returning home for the holidays in high glee, and promising themselves a world of enjoyment. It was delightful to hear the gigantic plans of the little rogues, and the impracticable feats they were to perform during their six weeks' emancipation from the abhorred thraldom of book, birch, and pedagogue. They were full of anticipations of the meeting with the family and household, down to the very cat and dog, and of the joy they were to give their little sisters by the presents with which their pockets were crammed; but the meeting to which they seemed to look forward with the greatest impatience was with Bantam, which I found to be a pony, and, according to their talk, possessed of more virtues than any steed since the days of Bucephalus. How he could trot! how he could run! and then such leaps as he would take!—there was not a hedge in the whole country that he could not clear.

They were under the particular guardianship of the coachman, to whom, whenever an opportunity presented, they addressed a host of questions, and pronounced him one of the best fellows in the world. Indeed, I could not but notice the more than ordinary air of bustle and importance of the coachman, who wore his hat a little on one side and had a large bunch of Christmas greens stuck in the buttonhole of his coat. He is always a personage full of mighty

care and business, but he is particularly so during this season, having so many commissions to execute in consequence of the great interchange of presents. And here, perhaps, it may not be unacceptable to my untraveled readers to have a sketch that may serve as a general representation of this very numerous and important class of functionaries, who have a dress, a manner, a language, an air peculiar to themselves and prevalent throughout the fraternity; so that whenever an English stage-coachman may be seen he cannot be mistaken for one of any other craft or mystery.

He has commonly a broad, full face, curiously mottled with red, as if the blood had been forced by hard feeding into every vessel of the skin; he is swelled into jolly dimensions by frequent potations of malt liquors, and his bulk is still further increased by a multiplicity of coats, in which he is buried like a cauliflower, the upper one reaching to his heels. He wears a broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat; a huge roll of colored handkerchief about his neck, knowingly knotted and tucked in at the bosom; and has in summer-time a large bouquet of flowers in his buttonhole, the present, most probably, of some enamored country lass. His waistcoat is commonly of some bright color, striped, and his small-clothes extend far below the knees, to meet a pair of jockey boots which reach about halfway up his legs.

All this costume is maintained with much precision; he has a pride in having his clothes of excellent materials, and, notwithstanding

the seeming grossness of his appearance, there is still discernible that neatness and propriety of person which is almost inherent in an Englishman. He enjoys great consequence and consideration along the road; has frequent conferences with the village housewives, who look upon him as a man of great trust and dependence; and he seems to have a good understanding with every bright-eyed country lass. The moment he arrives where the horses are to be changed, he throws down the reins with something of an air and abandons the cattle to the care of the ostler, his duty being merely to drive from one stage to another. When off the box his hands are thrust into the pockets of his great coat, and he rolls about the inn-yard with an air of the most absolute lordliness. Here he is generally surrounded by an admiring throng of ostlers, stable-boys, shoeblacks, and those nameless hangers-on that infest inns and taverns, and run errands and do all kinds of odd jobs for the privilege of battening on the drippings of the kitchen and the leakage of the tap-room. These all look up to him as to an oracle, treasure up his cant phrases, echo his opinions about horses and other topics of jockey lore, and, above all, endeavor to imitate his air and carriage. Every ragamuffin that has a coat to his back thrusts his hands in the pockets, rolls in his gait, talks slang, and is an embryo Coachey.

Perhaps it might be owing to the pleasing serenity that reigned in my own mind that I fancied I saw cheerfulness in every counte-

nance throughout the journey. A stage-coach, however, carries animation always with it, and puts the world in motion as it whirls along. The horn, sounded at the entrance of the village, produces a general bustle. Some hasten forth to meet friends; some with bundles and bandboxes to secure places, and in the hurry of the moment can hardly take leave of the group that accompanies them. In the meantime the coachman has a world of small commissions to execute. Sometimes he delivers a hare or pheasant; sometimes jerks a small parcel or newspaper to the door of a public house; and sometimes, with knowing leer and words of sly import, hands to some half-blushing, half-laughing housemaid and odd-shaped billet-doux from some rustic admirer. As the coach rattles through the village every one runs to the window, and you have glances on every side of fresh country faces and blooming giggling girls. At the corners are assembled juntos of village idlers and wise men, who take their stations there for the important purpose of seeing company pass; but the sagest knot is generally at the blacksmith's, to whom the passing of the coach is an event fruitful of much speculation. The smith, with the horse's heel in his lap, pauses as the vehicle whirls by; the cyclops round the anvil suspend their ringing hammers and suffer the iron to grow cool; and the sooty spectre in brown paper cap laboring at the bellows leans on the handle for a moment, and permits the asthmetic engine to heave a long-drawn sigh, while he glares

through the murky smoke and sulphurous gleams of the smithy.

Perhaps the impending holiday might have given a more than usual animation to the country, for it seemed to me as if everybody was in good looks and good spirits. Game, poultry, and other luxuries of the table were in brisk circulation in the villages; the grocers', butchers', and fruiters' shops were thronged with customers. The housewives were stirring briskly about, putting their dwellings in order, and the glossy branches of holly with their bright-red berries began to appear at the windows. The scene brought to mind an old writer's account of Christmas preparation: "Now capons and hens, besides turkeys, geese, and ducks, with beef and mutton, must all die, for in twelve days a multitude of people will not be fed with a little. Now plums and spice, sugar and honey, square it among pies and broth. Now or never must music be in tune, for the youth must dance and sing to get them a heat, while the aged sit by the fire. The country maid leaves half her market, and must be sent again if she forgets a pack of cards on Christmas Eve. Great is the contention of holly and ivy whether master or dame wears the breeches. Dice and cards benefit the butler; and if the cook do not lack wit, he will sweetly lick his fingers.

I was roused from this fit of luxurious meditation by a shout from my little traveling companions. They had been looking out of the coach-windows for the last few miles, recogniz-

ing every tree and cottage as they approached home, and now there was a general burst of joy. "There's John! and there's old Carlo! and there's Bantam!" cried the happy little rogues, clapping their hands.

At the end of a lane there was an old sober-looking servant in livery waiting for them; he was accompanied by a superannuated pointer and by the redoubtable Bantam, a little old rat of a pony with a shaggy mane and long rusty tail, who stood dozing quietly by the roadside, little dreaming of the bustling times that awaited him.

I was pleased to see the fondness with which the little fellows leaped about the steady old footman and hugged the pointer, who wriggled his whole body for joy. But Bantam was the great object of interest; all wanted to mount at once, and it was with some difficulty that John arranged that they should ride by turns and the eldest should ride first.

Off they set at last, one on the pony, with the dog bounding and barking before him, and the others holding John's hands, both talking at once and overpowering him with questions about home and with school anecdotes. I looked after them with a feeling in which I do not know whether pleasure or melancholy predominated; for I was reminded of those days when, like them, I had known neither care nor sorrow and a holiday was the summit of earthly felicity. We stopped a few moments afterwards to water the horses, and on resuming our route a turn of the road brought us in

sight of a neat country-seat. I could just distinguish the forms of a lady and two young girls in the portico, and I saw my little comrades, with Bantam, Carlo, and old John, trooping along the carriage-road. I leaned out of the coach-window, in hopes of witnessing the happy meeting, but a grove of trees shut it from my sight.

In the evening we reached a village where I had determined to pass the night. As we drove into the great gateway of the inn, I saw on one side the light of a rousing kitchen-fire beaming through a window. I entered, and admired, for the hundredth time, that picture of convenience, neatness, and broad honest enjoyment, the kitchen of an English inn. It was of spacious dimensions, hung around with copper and tin vessels, highly polished, and decorated here and there with a Christmas green. Hams, tongues, and flitches of bacon were suspended from the ceiling, a smoke-jack made its ceaseless clanking beside the fireplace, and a clock ticked in one corner. A well-scoured deal table extended along one side of the kitchen, with a cold round of beef and other hearty viands upon it, over which two foaming tankards of ale seemed mounting guard. Travelers of inferior order were preparing to attack this stout repast, while others sat smoking and gossiping over their ale on two high-backed oaken settles beside the fire. Trim housemaids were hurrying backwards and forwards under the directions of a fresh bustling landlady, but still seizing an occa-

sional moment to exchange a flippant word and have a rallying laugh with the group round the fire. The scene completely realized Poor Robin's humble idea of the comforts of mid-winter:

> Now trees their leafy hats do bare
> To reverence Winter's silver hair;
> A handsome hostess, merry host,
> A pot of ale now and a toast,
> Tobacco and a good coal fire,
> Are things this season doth require.*

I had not been long at the inn when a post-chaise drove up to the door. A young gentleman stepped out, and by the light of the lamps I caught a glimpse of a countenance which I thought I knew. I moved forward to get a nearer view, when his eye caught mine. I was not mistaken; it was Frank Bracebridge, a sprightly, good-humored young fellow with whom I had once traveled on the Continent. Our meeting was extremely cordial, for the countenance of an old fellow-traveler always brings up the recollection of a thousand pleasant scenes, odd adventures, and excellent jokes. To discuss all these in a transient interview at an inn was impossible; and, finding that I was not pressed for time and was merely making a tour of observation, he insisted that I should give him a day or two at his father's country seat, to which he was going to pass the holidays and which lay at a few miles' distance. "It is better than eating a solitary Christmas dinner at an inn," said he, "and I

*Poor Robin's Almanack, 1684.

can assure you of a hearty welcome in something of the old-fashioned style." His reasoning was cogent, and I must confess the preparation I had seen for universal festivity and social enjoyment had made me feel a little impatient of my loneliness. I closed, therefore, at once with his invitation; the chaise drove up to the door, and in a few moments I was on my way to the family mansion of the Bracebridges.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

Saint Francis and Saint Benedight
Blesse this house from wicked wight;
From the night-mare and the goblin,
That is hight good fellow Robin;
Keep it from all evil spirits,
Fairies, weasels, rats and ferrets:
From curfew time
To the next prime.

—Cartwright.

It was a brilliant moonlight night, but extremely cold; our chaise whirled rapidly over the frozen ground; the postboy smacked his whip incessantly, and a part of the time his horses were on a gallop. "He knows where he is going," said my companion, laughing, "and is eager to arrive in time for some of the merriment and good cheer of the servants' hall. My father, you must know, is a bigoted devotee of the old school, and prides himself upon keeping up something of old English hospitality. He is a tolerable specimen of what you will rarely meet with nowadays in its purity, the old English country gentleman; for our men of fortune spend so much of their time in town, and fashion is carried so much into the country, that the strong rich peculiarities of ancient rural life are almost polished away. My father, however, from early years,

took honest Peacham* for his text-book, instead of Chesterfield; he determined in his own mind that there was no condition more truly honorable and enviable than that of a country gentleman on his paternal lands, and, therefore, passes the whole of his time on his estate. He is a strenuous advocate for the revival of the old rural games and holiday observances, and is deeply read in the writers, ancient and modern, who have treated on the subject. Indeed, his favorite range of reading is among the authors who flourished at least two centuries since, who, he insists, wrote and thought more like true Englishmen than any of their successors. He even regrets sometimes that he had not been born a few centuries earlier, when England was itself and had its peculiar manners and customs. As he lives at some distance from the main road, in rather a lonely part of the country, without any rival gentry near him, he has that most enviable of all blessings to an Englishman—an opportunity of indulging the bent of his own humor without molestation. Being representative of the oldest family in the neighborhood, and a great part of the peasantry being his tenants, he is much looked up to, and in general is known simply by the appellation of 'The Squire'—a title which has been accorded to the head of the family since time immemorial. I think it best to give you these hints about my worthy old father, to prepare you for any

*Peacham's "Complete Gentlemen," 1622.

eccentricities that might otherwise appear absurd."

We had passed for some time along the wall of a park, and at length the chaise stopped at the gate. It was in a heavy, magnificent old style, of iron bars fancifully wrought at top into flourishes and flowers. The huge square columns that supported the gate were surmounted by the family crest. Close adjoining was the porter's lodge, sheltered under dark fir trees and almost buried in shrubbery.

The postboy rang a large porter's bell which resounded through the still frosty air, and was answered by the distant barking of dogs, with which the mansion-house seemed garrisoned. An old woman immediately appeared at the gate. As the moonlight fell strongly upon her, I had a full view of a little primitive dame, dressed very much in the antique taste, with a neat kerchief and stomacher, and her silver hair peeping from under a cap of snowy whiteness. She came curtseying forth, with many expressions of simple joy at seeing her young master. Her husband, it seemed, was up at the house keeping Christmas Eve in the servants' hall; they could not do without him, as he was the best hand at a song and story in the household.

My friend proposed that we should alight and walk through the park to the hall, which was at no great distance, while the chaise should follow on. Our road wound through a noble avenue of trees, among the naked branches of which the moon glittered as she

rolled through the deep vault of a cloudless sky. The lawn beyond was sheeted with a slight covering of snow, which here and there sparkled as the moonbeams caught a frosty crystal, and at a distance might be seen a thin transparent vapor stealing up from the low grounds and threatening gradually to shroud the landscape.

My companion looked around him with transport. "How often," said he, "have I scampered up this avenue on returning home on school vacations! How often have I played under these trees when a boy! I feel a degree of filial reverence for them, as we look up to those who have cherished us in childhood. My father was always scrupulous in exacting our holidays and having us around him on family festivals. He used to direct and superintend our games with the strictness that some parents do the studies of their children. He was very particular that we should play the old English games according to their original form, and consulted old books for precedent and authority for every 'merrie disport'; yet I assure you there never was pedantry so delightful. It was the policy of the good old gentleman to make his children feel that home was the happiest place in the world; and I value this delicious home-feeling as one of the choicest gifts a parent could bestow."

We were interrupted by the clamor of a troop of dogs of all sorts and sizes, "mongrel, puppy, whelp, and hound, and curs of low degree," that, disturbed by the ring of the porter's bell

and the rattling of the chaise, came bounding, open-mouthed, across the lawn.

"'——The little dogs and all,
Tray, Blanch and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me!'"

cried Bracebridge, laughing. At the sound of his voice the bark was changed into a yelp of delight, and in a moment he was surrounded and almost overpowered by the caresses of the faithful animals.

We had now come in full view of the old family mansion, partly thrown in deep shadow and partly lit up by the cold moonshine. It was an irregular building of some magnitude, and seemed to be of the architecture of different periods. One wing was evidently very ancient, with heavy stone-shafted bow windows jutting out and overrun with ivy, from among the foliage of which the small diamond-shaped panes of glass glittered with the moonbeams. The rest of the house was in the French taste of Charles the Second's time, having been repaired and altered, as my friend told me, by one of his ancestors who returned with that monarch at the Restoration. The grounds about the house were laid out in the old formal manner of artificial flower-beds, clipped shrubberies, raised terraces, and heavy stone balustrades, ornamented with urns, a leaden statue or two, and a jet of water. The old gentleman, I was told, was extremely careful to preserve this obsolete finery in all its original state. He admired this fashion in gardening: it had an air of magnificence, was

courtly and noble, and befiting good old family style. The boasted imitation of Nature in modern gardening had sprung up with modern republican notions but did not suit, a monarchical government; it smacked of the leveling system. I could not help smiling at this introduction of politics into gardening, though I expressed some apprehension that I should find the old gentleman rather intolerant in his creed. Frank assured me, however, that it was almost the only instance in which he had ever heard his father meddle with politics; and he believed that he had got this notion from a member of Parliament who once passed a few weeks with him. The squire was glad of any argument to defend his clipped yew trees and formal terraces, which had been occasionally attacked by modern landscape gardeners.

As we approached the house we heard the sound of music, and now and then a burst of laughter from one end of the building. This, Bracebridge said, must proceed from the servants' hall, where a great deal of revelry was permitted, and even encouraged, by the squire throughout the twelve days of Christmas, provided everything was done conformably to ancient usage. Here were kept up the old games of hoodman blind, shoe the wild mare, hot cockles, steal the white loaf, bob apple, and snap dragon; the Yule-clog and Christmas candle were regularly burnt, and the mistletoe with

its white berries hung up, to the imminent peril of all the pretty housemaids.*

So intent were the servants upon their sports that we had to ring repeatedly before we could make ourselves heard. On our arrival being announced the squire came out to receive us, accompanied by his two other sons—one a young officer in the army, home on a leave of absence; the other an Oxonian, just from the university. The squire was a fine healthy looking old gentleman, with silver hair curling lightly around an open florid countenance, in which the physiognomist, with the advantage, like myself, of a previous hint or two, might discover a singular mixture of whim and benevolence.

The family meeting was warm and affectionate; as the evening was far advanced, the squire would not permit us to change our traveling dresses, but ushered us at once to the company, which was assembled in a large old-fashioned hall. It was composed of different branches of a numerous family connection, where there were the usual proportion of old uncles and aunts, comfortable married dames, superannuated spinsters, blooming country cousins, half-fledged striplings, and bright-eyed boarding-school hoydens. They were variously occupied — some at a round

* The mistletoe is still hung up in farm houses and kitchens at Christmas, and the young men have the privilege of kissing the girls under it, plucking each time a berry from the bush. When the berries are all plucked the privilege ceases.

game of cards; others conversing around the fireplace; at one end of the hall was a group of the young folks, some nearly grown up, others of a more tender and budding age, fully engrossed by a merry game; and a profusion of wooden horses, penny trumpets, and tattered dolls about the floor showed traces of a troop of little fairy beings who, having frolicked through a happy day, had been carried off to slumber through a peaceful night.

While the mutual greetings were going on between young Bracebridge and his relatives I had time to scan the apartment. I have called it a hall, for so it had certainly been in old times, and the squire had evidently endeavored to restore it to something of its primitive state. Over the heavy projecting fireplace was suspended a picture of a warrior in armor, standing by a white horse, and on the opposite wall hung a helmet, buckler, and lance. At one end an enormous pair of antlers were inserted in the wall, the branches serving as hooks on which to suspend hats, whips, and spurs, and in the corners of the apartment were fowling-pieces, fishing-rods, and other sporting implements. The furniture was of the cumbrous workmanship of former days, though some articles of modern convenience had been added and the oaken floor had been carpeted, so that the whole presented an odd mixture of parlor and hall.

The grate had been removed from the wide overwhelming fireplace to make way for a

fire of wood, in the midst of which was an enormous log glowing and blazing, and sending forth a vast volume of light and heat: this, I understood, was the Yule-clog, which the squire was particular in having brought in and illuminated on a Christmas Eve, according to ancient custom.*

It was really delightful to see the old squire seated in his hereditary elbow-chair by the hospitable fireside of his ancestors, and looking around him like the sun of a system, beaming warmth and gladness to every heart. Even the very dog that lay stretched at his feet, as

* The Yule-clog is a great log of wood, sometimes the root of a tree, brought into the house with great ceremony on Christmas Eve, laid in the fire-place, and lighted with the brand of last year's clog. While it lasted there was great drinking, singing, and telling of tales. Sometimes it was accompanied by Christmas candles; but in the cottages the only light was from the ruddy blaze of the great wood fire. The Yule-clog was to burn all night; if it went out, it was considered a sign of ill-luck.

Herrick mentions it in one of his songs:

Come, bring with a noise,
My merrie, merrie boys,
The Christmas Log to the firing;
While my good dame, she
Bids ye all be free,
And drink to your hearts' desiring.

The Yule-clog is still burnt in many farm-houses and kitchens in England, particularly in the north, and there are several superstitions connected with it among the peasantry. If a squinting person come to the house while it is burning, or a person barefooted, it is considered an ill omen. The brand remaining from the Yule-clog is carefully put away to light the next year's Christmas fire.

he lazily shifted his position and yawned would look fondly up in his master's face, wag his tail against the floor, and stretch himself again to sleep, confident of kindness and protection. There is an emanation from the heart in genuine hospitality which cannot be described, but is immediately felt and puts the stranger at once at his ease. I had not been seated many minutes by the comfortable hearth of the worthy old cavalier before I found myself as much at home as if I had been one of the family.

Supper was announced shortly after our arrival. It was served up in a spacious oaken chamber, the panels of which shone with wax, and around which were several family portraits decorated with holly and ivy. Besides the accustomed lights, two great wax tapers, called Christmas candles, wreathed with greens, were placed on a highly polished beaufet among the family plate. The table was abundantly spread with substantial fare; but the squire made his supper of frumenty, a dish made of wheat cakes boiled in milk with rich spices, being a standing dish in old times for Christmas Eve. I was happy to find my old friend, minced pie, in the retinue of the feast; and, finding him to be perfectly orthodox, and that I need not be ashamed of my predilection, I greeted him with all the warmth wherewith we usually greet an old and very genteel acquaintance.

The mirth of the company was greatly promoted by the humors of an eccentric personage

whom Mr. Bracebridge always addressed with the quaint appellation of Master Simon. He was a tight brisk little man, with the air of an arrant old bachelor. His nose was shaped like the bill of a parrot; his face slightly pitted with the small-pox, with a dry perpetual bloom on it, like a frost-bitten leaf in autumn. He had an eye of great quickness and vivacity, with a drollery and lurking waggery of expression that was irresistible. He was evidently the wit of the family, dealing very much in sly jokes and innuendoes with the ladies, and making infinite merriment by harping upon old themes, which, unfortunately, my ignorance of the family chronicles did not permit me to enjoy. It seemed to be his great delight during supper to keep a young girl next to him in a continual agony of stifled laughter, in spite of her awe of the reproving looks of her mother, who sat opposite. Indeed, he was the idol of the younger part of the company, who laughed at everything he said or did and at every turn of his countenance. I could not wonder at it; for he must have been a miracle of accomplishments in their eyes. He could imitate Punch and Judy; make an old woman of his hand, with the assistance of a burnt cork and pocket-handkerchief; and cut an orange into such a ludicrous caricature that the young folks were ready to die with laughing.

I was let briefly into his history by Frank Bracebridge. He was an old bachelor, of a small independent income, which by careful

management was sufficient for all his wants. He revolved through the family system like a vagrant comet in its orbit, sometimes visiting one branch, and sometimes another quite remote, as is often the case with gentlemen of extensive connections and small fortunes in England. He had a chirping, buoyant disposition, always enjoying the present moment; and his frequent change of scene and company prevented his acquiring those rusty, unaccommodating habits with which old bachelors are so uncharitably charged. He was a complete family chronicle, being versed in the genealogy, history, and intermarriages of the whole house of Bracebridge, which made him a great favorite with the old folks; he was a beau of all the elder ladies and superannuated spinsters, among whom he was habitually considered rather a young fellow; and he was master of the revels among the children, so that there was not a more popular being in the sphere in which he moved than Mr. Simon Bracebridge. Of late years he had resided almost entirely with the squire, to whom he had become a factotum, and whom he particularly delighted by jumping with his humor in respect to old times and by having a scrap of an old song to suit every occasion. We had presently a specimen of his last-mentioned talent, for no sooner was supper removed and spiced wines and other beverages peculiar to the season introduced, than Master Simon was called on for a good old Christmas song. He bethought himself for a moment, and then,

with a sparkle of the eye and a voice that was by no means bad, except that it ran occasionally into a falsetto like the notes of a split reed, he quavered forth a quaint old ditty:

> Now Christmas is come,
> Let us beat up the drum,
> And call all our neighbors together;
> And when they appear,
> Let us make them such cheer,
> As will keep out the wind and the weather, etc.

The supper had disposed every one to gayety, and an old harper was summoned from the servant's hall, where he had been strumming all the evening, and to all appearance comforting himself with some of the squire's home-brewed. He was a kind of hanger-on, I was told, of the establishment, and, though ostensibly a resident of the village, was oftener to be found in the squire's kitchen than his own home, the old gentleman being fond of the sound of "harp in hall."

The dance, like most dances after supper, was a merry one: some of the older folks joined in it, and the squire himself figured down several couple with a partner with whom he affirmed he had danced at every Christmas for nearly half a century. Master Simon, who seemed to be a kind of connecting link between the old times and the new, and to be withal a little antiquated in the taste of his accomplishments, evidently piqued himself on his dancing, and was endeavoring to gain credit by the heel and toe, rigadoon, and other

graces of the ancient school; but he had unluckily assorted himself with a little romping girl from boarding-school, who by her wild vivacity kept him continually on the stretch and defeated all his sober attempts at elegance; such are the ill-storted matches to which antique gentlemen are unfortunately prone.

The young Oxonian, on the contrary, had led out one of his maiden aunts, on whom the rogue played a thousand little knaveries with impunity: he was full of practical jokes, and his delight was to tease his aunts and cousins, yet, like all madcap youngsters, he was a universal favorite among the women. The most interesting couple in the dance was the young officer and a ward of the squire's, a beautiful blushing girl of seventeen. From several shy glances which I had noticed in the course of the evening I suspected there was a little kindness growing up between them; and indeed the young soldier was just the hero to captivate a romantic girl. He was tall, slender, and handsome, and, like most young British officers of late years, had picked up various small accomplishments on the Continent: he could talk French and Italian, draw landscapes, sing very tolerably, dance divinely; but, above all, he had been wounded at Waterloo. What girl of seventeen, well read in poetry and romance, could resist such a mirror of chivalry and perfection?

The moment the dance was over he caught up a guitar, and, lolling against the old marble

fireplace in an attitude which I am half inclined to suspect was studied, began the little French air of the Troubadour. The squire, however, exclaimed against having anything on Christmas Eve but good old English; upon which the young minstrel, casting up his eye for a moment as if in an effort of memory, struck into another strain, and with a charming air of gallantry gave Herrick's "Night-Piece to Julia:"

Her eyes the glow-worm lend thee,
The shooting stars attend thee,
And the elves also,
Whose little eyes glow
Like the sparks of fire, befriend thee.

No Will-o'-the-Wisp mislight thee;
Nor snake nor slow-worm bit thee
But on thy way,
Not making a stay,
Since ghost there is none to affright thee.

Then let not the dark thee cumber;
What though the moon does slumber,
The stars of the night
Will lend thee their light,
Like tapers clear without number.

Then, Julia, let me woo thee,
Thus, thus to come unto me,
And when I shall meet
Thy silvery feet,
My soul I'll pour unto thee.

The song might or might not have been intended in compliment to the fair Julia, for so I found his partner was called; she, however, was certainly unconscious of any such applica-

tion, for she never looked at the singer, but kept her eyes cast upon the floor. Her face was suffused, it is true, with a beautiful blush, and there was a gentle heaving of the bosom, but all that was doubtless caused by the exercise of the dance; indeed, so great was her indifference that she amused herself with plucking to pieces a choice bouquet of hot-house flowers, and by the time the song was concluded the nose-gay lay in ruins on the floor.

The party now broke up for the night with the kind-hearted old custom of shaking hands. As I passed through the hall on my way to my chamber, the dying embers of the Yule-clog still sent forth a dusky glow, and had it not been the season when "no spirit dares stir abroad," I should have been half tempted to steal from my room at midnight and peep whether the fairies might not be at their revels about the hearth.

My chamber was in the old part of the mansion, the ponderous furniture of which might have been fabricated in the days of the giants. The room was paneled, with cornices of heavy carved work, in which flowers and grotesque faces were strangely intermingled, and a row of black-looking portraits stared mournfully at me from the walls. The bed was of rich though faded damask, with a lofty tester, and stood in a niche opposite a bow window. I had scarcely got into bed when a strain of music seemed to break forth in the air just below the window. I listened, and found it proceeded from a band which I concluded to be the Waits

from some neighboring village. They went round the house, playing under the windows. I drew aside the curtains to hear them more distinctly. The moonbeams fell through the upper part of the casement; partially lighting up the antiquated apartment. The sounds, as they receded, became more soft and aerial, and seemed to accord with the quiet and moonlight. I listened and listened—they became more and more tender and remote, and, as they gradually died away, my head sunk upon the pillow and I fell asleep.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

Dark and dull night, flie hence away.
And give the honor to this day
That sees December turn'd to May.

. . . . . .

Why does the chilling winter's morne
Smile like a field beset with corn?
Or smell like to a meade new-shorne,
Thus on the sudden?—come and see
The cause why things thus fragrant be.

—Herrick.

When I woke the next morning it seemed as if all the events of the preceding evening had been a dream, and nothing but the identity of the ancient chamber convinced me of their reality. While I lay musing on my pillow I heard the sound of little feet pattering outside of the door, and a whispering consultation. Presently a choir of small voices chanted forth an old Christmas carol, the burden of which was—

Rejoice, our Saviour he was born
On Christmas Day in the morning.

I rose softly, slipt on my clothes, opened the door suddenly, and beheld one of the most beautiful little fairy groups that a painter could imagine. It consisted of a boy and two girls, the eldest not more than six, and lovely as seraphs. They were going the rounds of the

house and singing at very chamber door, but my sudden appearance frightened them into mute bashfulness. They remained for a moment playing on their lips with their fingers, and now and then stealing a shy glance from under their eyebrows, until, as if by one impulse, they scampered away, and as they turned an angle of the gallery I heard them laughing in triumph at their escape.

Everything conspired to produce kind and happy feelings in this stronghold of old-fashioned hospitality. The window of my chamber looked out upon what in summer would have been a beautiful landscape. There was a sloping lawn, a fine stream winding at the foot of it, and a tract of park beyond, with noble clumps of trees and herds of deer. At a distance was a neat hamlet, with the smoke from the cottage chimneys hanging over it, and a church with its dark spire in strong relief against the clear cold sky. The house was surrounded with evergreens, according to the English custom, which would have given almost an appearance of summer; but the morning was extremely frosty; the light vapor of the preceding evening had been precipitated by the cold, and covered all the trees and every blade of grass with its fine crystallizations. The rays of a bright morning sun had a dazzling effect among the glittering foliage. A robin, perched upon the top of a mountain-ash that hung its clusters of red berries just before my window, was basking himself in the sunshine and piping a few querulous notes, and a peacock was

displaying all the glories of his train and strutting with the pride and gravity of a Spanish grandee on the terrace walk below.

I had scarcely dressed myself when a servant appeared to invite me to family prayers. He showed me the way to a small chapel in the old wing of the house, where I found the principal part of the family already assembled in a kind of gallery furnished with cushions, hassocks, and large prayer-books; the servants were seated on benches below. The old gentleman read prayers from a desk in front of the gallery, and Master Simon acted as clerk and made the responses; and I must do him the justice to say that he acquitted himself with great gravity and decorum.

The service was followed by a Christmas carol, which Mr. Bracebridge himself had constructed from a poem of his favorite author, Herrick, and it had been adapted to an old church melody by Master Simon. As there were several good voices among the household, the effect was extremely pleasing, but I was particularly gratified by the exaltation of heart and sudden sally of grateful feeling with which the worthy squire delivered one stanza, his eye glistening and his voice rambling out of all the bounds of time and tune:

"'Tis Thou that crown'st my glittering hearth
With guiltless mirth,
And givest me Wassaile bowles to drink
Spiced to the brink;
Lord, 'tis Thy plenty-dropping hand
That soiles my land:

And giv'st me for my bushell sowne,
Twice ten for one."

I afterwards understood that early morning service was read on every Sunday and saint's day throughout the year, either by Mr. Bracebridge or by some member of the family. It was once almost universally the case at the seats of the nobility and gentry of England, and it is much to be regretted that the custom is falling into neglect; for the dullest observer must be sensible of the order and serenity prevalent in those households where the occasional exercise of a beautiful form of worship in the morning gives, as it were, the keynote to every temper for the day and attunes every spirit to harmony.

Our breakfast consisted of what the squire denominated true old English fare. He indulged in some bitter lamentations over modern breakfasts of tea and toast, which he censured as among the causes of modern effeminancy and weak nerves and the decline of old English heartiness; and, though he admitted them to his table to suit the palates of his guests, yet there was a brave display of cold meats, wine, and ale on the sideboard.

After breakfast I walked about the grounds with Frank Bracebridge and Master Simon, or Mr. Simon, as he was called by everybody but the squire. We were escorted by a number of gentlemanlike dogs, that seemed loungers about the establishment, from the frisking spaniel to the steady old stag-hound, the last of which was of a race that had been in the

family time out of mind; they were all obedient to a dog-whistle which hung to Master Simon's buttonhole, and in the midst of their gambols would glance an eye occasionally upon a small switch he carried in his hand.

The old mansion had a still more venerable look in the yellow sunshine than by pale moonlight; and I could not but feel the force of the squire's idea that the formal terraces, heavily moulded balustrades, and clipped yew trees carried with them an air of proud aristocracy. There appeared to be an unusual number of peacocks about the place, and I was making some remarks upon what I termed a flock of them that were basking under a sunny wall, when I was gently corrected in my phraseology by Master Simon, who told me that according to the most ancient and approved treatise on hunting I must say a muster of peacocks. "In the same way," added he, with a slight air of pedantry, "we say a flight of doves or swallows, a bevy of quails, a herd of deer, of wrens, or cranes, a skulk of foxes, or a building of rooks." He went on to inform me that, according to Sir Anthony Fitzherbert, we ought to ascribe to this bird "both understanding and glory; for, being praised, he will presently set up his tail, chiefly against the sun, to the intent you may the better behold the beauty thereof. But at the fall of the leaf, when his tail falleth, he will mourn and hide himself in corners till his tail come again as it was."

I could not help smiling at this display of

small erudition on so whimsical a subject; but I found that the peacocks were birds of some consequence at the hall, for Frank Bracebridge informed me that they were great favorites with his father, who was extremely careful to keep up the breed; partly because they belonged to chivalry, and were in great request at the stately banquets of the olden time, and partly because they had a pomp and magnificence about them highly becoming an old family mansion. Nothing, he was accustomed to say, had an air of greater state and dignity than a peacock perched upon an antique stone balustrade.

Master Simon had now to hurry off, having an appointment at the parish church with the village choristers, who were to perform some music of his selection. There was something extremely agreeable in the cheerful flow of animal spirits of the little man; and I confess I had been somewhat surprised at his apt quotations from authors who certainly were not in the range of every-day reading. I mentioned this last circumstance to Frank Bracebridge, who told me with a smile that Master Simon's whole stock of erudition was confined to some half a dozen old authors, which the squire had put into his hands, and which he read over and over whenever he had a studious fit, as he sometimes had on a rainy day or a long winter evening. Sir Anthony Fitzherbert's "Book of Husbandry," Markham's "Country Contentments," the "Tretyse of Hunting," by Sir Thomas Cockayne, Knight, Isaac Walton's

"Angler," and two ar three more such ancient worthies of the pen were his standard authorities; and, like all men who knew but a few books, he looked up to them with a kind of idolatry and quoted them on all occasions. As to his songs, they were chiefly picked out of old books in the squire's library, and adapted to tunes that were popular among the choice spirits of the last century. His practical application of scraps of literature, however, had caused him to be looked upon as a prodigy of book-knowledge by all the grooms, hunstmen, and small sportsmen of the neighborhood.

While we were talking we heard the distant toll of the village bell, and I was told that the squire was a little particular in having his household at church on a Christmas morning, considering it a day of pouring out of thanks and rejoicing; for, as old Tusser observed,—

"At Christmas be merry, and thankful withal,
And feast thy poor neighbors, the great with the small."

"If you are disposed to go to church," said Frank Bracebridge, "I can promise you a specimen of my cousin Simon's musical achievements. As the church is destitute of an organ, he has formed a band from the village amateurs, and established a musical club for their improvement; he has also sorted a choir, as he sorted my father's pack of hounds, according to the directions of Jervaise Markham in his 'Country Contentments:' for the bass he has sought out of all the 'deep, solemn mouths,' and for the tenor the 'loud-ringing mouths,'

among the country bumpkins, and for 'sweet-mouths,' he has culled with curious taste among the prettiest lasses in the neighborhood; though these last, he affirms, are the most difficult to keep in tune, your pretty female singer being exceedingly wayward and capricious, and very liable to accident."

As the morning, though frosty, was remarkably fine and clear, the most of the family walked to the church, which was a very old building of gray stone, and stood near a village about half a mile from the park gate. Adjoining it was a low snug parsonage which seemed coeval with the church. The front of it was perfectly matted with a yew tree that had been trained against its walls, through the dense foliage of which apertures had been formed to admit light into the small antique lattices. As we passed this sheltered nest the parson issued forth and preceded us.

I had expected to see a sleek well-conditioned pastor, such as is often found in a snug living in the vicinity of a rich patron's table, but I was disappointed. The parson was a little, meagre, black-looking man, with a grizzled wig that was too wide and stood off from each ear; so that his head seemed to have shrunk away within it, like a dried filbert in its shell. He wore a rusty coat, with great skirts and pockets that would have held the church Bible and prayer-book: and his small legs seemed still smaller from being planted in large shoes decorated with enormous buckles.

I was informed by Frank Bracebridge that the parson had been a chum of his father's at Oxford, and had received this living shortly after the latter had come to his estate. He was a complete black-letter hunter, and would scarcely read a work printed in the Roman character. The editions of Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde were his delight, and he was indefatigable in his researches after such old English writers as had fallen into oblivion from their worthlessness. In deference, perhaps, to the notions of Mr. Bracebridge he had made diligent investigations into the festive rites and holiday customs of former times, and had been as zealous in the inquiry as if he had been a boon companion; but it was merely with that plodding spirit with which men of a dust temperament follow up any track of study, merely because it is denominated learning; indifferent to its intrinsic nature, whether it be the illustration of the wisdom or of the ribaldry and obscenity of antiquity. He had pored over these old volumes so intensely that they seemed to have been reflected into his countenance; which, if the face be indeed an index of the mind, might be compared to a title-page of black-letter.

On reaching the church-porch we found the parson rebuking the gray-headed sexton for having used mistletoe among the greens with which the church was decorated. It was, he observed, an unholy plant, profaned by having been used by the Druids in their mystic ceremonies; and, though it might be innocently

employed in the festive ornamenting of halls and kitchens, yet it had been deemed by the fathers of the church as unhallowed and totally unfit for sacred purposes. So tenacious was he on this point that the poor sexton was obliged to strip down a great part of the humble trophies of his taste before the parson would consent to enter upon the service of the day.

The interior of the church was venerable, but simple; on the walls were several mural monuments of the Bracebridges, and just beside the altar was a tomb of ancient workmanship, on which lay the effigy of a warrior in armor with his legs crossed, a sign of his having been a crusader. I was told it was one of the family who had signalized himself in the Holy Land, and the same whose picture hung over the fireplace in the hall.

During service Master Simon stood up in the pew and repeated the responses very audibly, evincing that kind of ceremonious devotion punctually observed by a gentleman of the old school and a man of old family connections. I observed too that he turned over the leaves of a folio prayer-book with something of a flourish; possibly to show off an enormous seal-ring which enriched one of his fingers and which had the look of a family relic. But he was evidently most solicitous about the musical part of the service, keeping his eye fixed intently on the choir, and beating time wih much gesticulation and emphasis.

The orchestra was in a small gallery, and

presented a most whimsical grouping of heads piled one above the other, among which I particularly noticed that of the village tailor, a pale fellow with a retreated forehead and chin, who played on the clarinet, and seemed to have blown his face to a point; and there was another, a short pursy man, stooping and laboring at a bass-viol, so as to show nothing but the top of a round bald head, like the egg of an ostrich. There were two or three pretty faces among the female singers, to which the keen air of a frosty morning had given a bright rosy tint; but the gentleman choristers had evidently been chosen, like old Cremona fiddles, more for tone than looks; and as several had to sing from the same book, there were clusterings of odd physiognomies not unlike those groups of cherubs we sometimes see on country tombstones.

The usual services of the choir were managed tolerably well, the vocal parts generally lagging a little behind the instrumental, and some loitering fiddler now and then making up for lost time by traveling over a passage with prodigious celerity and clearing more bars than the keenest fox-hunter to be in at the death. But the great trial was an anthem that had been prepared and arranged by Master Simon, and on which he had founded great expectation. Unluckily, there was a blunder at the very outset; the musicians became flurried; Master Simon was in a fever; everything went on lamely and irregularly until they came to a chorus beginning, "Now, let us sing with

one accord," which seemed to be a signal for parting company; all became discord and confusion; each shifted for himself, and got to the end as well—or, rather, as soon—as he could, excepting one old chorister in a pair of horn spectacles bestriding and pinching a long sonorous nose, who happened to stand a little apart, and, being wrapped up in his own melody, kept on a quavering course, wriggling his head, ogling his book, and winding all up by a nasal solo of at least three bars' duration.

The parson gave us a most erudite sermon on the rites and ceremonies of Christmas, and the propriety of observing it not merely as a day of thanksgiving, but of rejoicing, supporting the correctness of his opinions by the earliest usages of the Church, and enforcing them by the authorities of Theophilus of Cæsarea, St. Cyprian, St. Chrysostom, St. Augustine, and a cloud more of saints and fathers, from whom he made copious quotations. I was a little at a loss to perceive the necessity of such a mighty array of forces to maintain a point which no one present seemed inclined to dispute; but I soon found that the good man had a legion of ideal adversaries to contend with, having in the course of his researches on the subject of Christmas got completely embroiled in the sectarian controversies of the Revolution, when the Puritans made such a fierce assault upon the ceremonies of the Church, and poor old Christmas was driven out of the land by

proclamation of Parliament.* The worthy parson lived but with times past, and knew but little of the present.

Shut up among worm-eaten tomes in the retirement of his antiquated little study, the pages of old times were to him as the gazettes of the day, while the era of the Revolution was mere modern history. He forgot that nearly two centuries had elapsed since the fiery persecution of poor mince-pie throughout the land; when plum porridge was denounced as "mere popery," and roast beef as anti-christian, and that Christmas had been brought in again triumphantly with the merry court of King Charles at the Restoration. He kindled into warmth with the ardor of his contest and the host of imaginary foes with whom he had to combat; he had a stubborn conflict with old Prynne and two or three other forgotten champions of the Roundheads on the subject of

*From the "Flying Eagle," a small gazette, published December 24, 1652: "The House spent much time this day about the business of the Navy, for settling the affairs at sea, and before they rose, were presented with a terrible remonstrance against Christmas day, grounded upon divine Scriptures, 2 Cor. v. 16; 1 Cor. xv. 14, 17; and in honor of the Lord's Day, grounded upon these Scriptures, John xx. 1; Rev. i. 10; Psalms cxviii. 24; Lev. xxiii. 7, 11; Mark xv. 8; Psalms lxxxiv. 10, in which Christmas is called Anti-Christ's masse, and those Masse-mongers and Papists who observe it, etc. In consequence of which Parliaments spent some time in consultation about the abolition of Christmas day, passed orders to that effect, and resolved to sit on the following day, which was commonly called Christmas day."

Christmas festivity; and concluded by urging his hearers, in the most solemn and affecting manner, to stand to the traditional customs of their fathers and feast and make merry on this joyful anniversary of the Church.

I have seldom known a sermon attended apparently with more immediate effects, for on leaving the church the congregation seemed one and all possessed with the gayety of spirit so earnestly enjoined by their pastor. The elder folks gathered in knots in the churchyard, greeting and shaking hands, and the children ran about crying Ule! Ule! and repeating some uncouth rhymes,* which the parson, who had joined us, informed me had been handed down from days of yore. The villagers doffed their hats to the squire as he passed, giving him the good wishes of the season with every appearance of heartfelt sincerity, and were invited by him to the hall to take something to keep out the cold of the weather; and I heard blessings uttered by several of the poor, which convinced me that, in the midst of his enjoyments, the worthy old cavalier had not forgotten the true Christmas virtue of charity.

On our way homeward his heart seemed overflowed with generous and happy feelings. As we passed over a rising round which commanded something of a prospect, the sounds of rustic merriment now and then reached our ears; the squire paused for a few moments and

*"Ule! Ule!
Three puddings in a pule;
Crack nuts and cry ule!"

looked around with an air of inexpressible benignity. The beauty of the day was of itself sufficient to inspire philanthropy. Notwithstanding the frostiness of the morning, the sun in his cloudless journey had acquired sufficient power to melt away the thin covering of snow from every southern declivity, and to bring out the living green which adorns an English landscape even in mid-winter. Large tracts of smiling verdure contrasted with the dazzling whiteness of the shaded slopes and hollows. Every sheltered bank on which the broad rays rested yielded its silver rill of cold and limpid water, glittering through the dripping grass, and sent up slight exhalations to contribute to the thin haze that hung just above the surface of the earth. There was something truly cheering in this triumph of warmth and verdure over the frosty thraldom of winter; it was, as the squire observed, an emblem of Christmas hospitality breaking through the chills of ceremony and selfishness and thawing every heart into a flow. He pointed with pleasure to the indications of good cheer reeking from the chimneys of the comfortable farm-houses and low thatched cottages. "I love," said he, "to see this day well kept by rich and poor; it is a great thing to have one day in the year, at least, when you are sure of being welcome wherever you go, and of having, as it were, the world all thrown open to you; and I am almost disposed to join with Poor Robin in his malediction on every churlish enemy to this honest festival:

" 'Those who at Christmas do repine,
And would fain hence dispatch him,
May they with old Duke Humphry dine,
Or else may Squire Ketch catch 'em.' "

The squire went on to lament the deplorable decay of the games and amusements which were once prevalent at this season among the lower orders and countenanced by the higher, when the old halls of castles and manor-houses were thrown open at daylight; when the tables were covered with brawn and beef and humming ale; when the harp and the carol resounded all day long; and when rich and poor were alike welcome to enter and make merry.* "Our old games and local customs," said he, "had a great effect in making the peasant fond of his home, and the promotion of them by the gentry made him fond of his lord. They made the times merrier and kinder and better, and I can truly say, with one of our old poets,

" 'I like them well; the curious preciseness
And all-pretended gravity of those
That seek to banish hence these harmless sports,
Have thrust away much ancient honesty."

"The nation," continued he, "is altered; we have almost lost our simple hearted peasantry.

*"An English gentleman, at the opening of the great day—i. e., on Christmas Day in the morning—had all his tenants and neighbors enter his hall by daybreak. The strong beer was broached, and the black-jacks went plentifully about, with toast, sugar and nutmeg, and good Cheshire cheese. The Hackin (the great sausage) must be boiled by daybreak, or else two young men must take the maiden (i. e., the cook) by the arms and run her round the market-place till she is shamed of her laziness."—Round about our Sea-Coal Fire.

They have broken asunder from the higher classes, and seem to think their interests are separate. They have become too knowing, and begin to read newspapers, listen to alehouse politicians, and talk of reform. I think one mode to keep them in good-humor in these hard times would be for the nobility and gentry to pass more time on their estates, mingle more among the country-people, and set the merry old English games going again."

Such was the good squire's project for mitigating public discontent: and, indeed, he had once attempted to put his doctrine in practice, and a few years before he had kept open house during the holidays in the old style. The country-people, however, did not understand how to play their parts in the scene of hospitality; many uncouth circumstances occurred; the manor was overrun by all the vagrants of the country, and more beggars drawn into the neighborhood in one week than the parish officers could get rid of in a year. Since then he had contented himself with inviting the decent part of the neighboring peasantry to call at the hall on Christmas Day, and with distributing beef, and bread, and ale among the poor, that they might make merry in their own dwellings.

We had not been long home when the sound of music was heard from a distance. A band of country lads, without coats, their shirt-sleeves fancifully tied with ribbons, their hats decorated with greens, and clubs in their hands, was seen advancing up the avenue,

followed by a large number of villagers and peasantry. They stopped before the hall door, where the music struck up a peculiar air, and the lads performed a curious and intricate dance, advancing, retreating, and striking their clubs together, keeping exact time to the music; while one, whimsically crowned with a fox's skin, the tail of which flaunted down his back, kept capering round the skirts of the dance and rattling a Christmas box with many antic gesticulations.

The squire eyed this fanciful exhibition with great interest and delight, and gave me a full account of its origin, which he traced to the times when the Romans held possession of the island, plainly proving that this was a lineal descendant of the sword dance of the ancients. "It was now," he said, "nearly extinct, but he had accidentally met with traces of it in the neighborhood, and had encouraged its revival; though, to tell the truth, it was too apt to be followed up by the rough cudgel play and broken heads in the evening."

After the dance was concluded the whole party was entertained with brawn and beef and stout home-brewed. The squire himself mingled among the rustics, and was received with awkward demonstrations of deference and regard. It is true I perceived two or three of the younger peasants, as they were raising their tankards to their mouths, when the squire's back was turned making something of a grimace, and giving each other the wink; but the moment they caught my eye they pulled grave

faces and were exceedingly demure. With Master Simon, however, they all seemed more at their ease. His varied occupations and amusements had made him well known throughout the neighborhood. He was a visitor at every farm-house and cottage, gossiped with the farmers and their wives, romped with their daughters, and, like that type of a vagrant bachelor, the humblebee, tolled the sweets from all the rosy lips of the country round.

The bashfulness of the guests soon gave way before good cheer and affability. There is something genuine and affectionate in the gayety of the lower orders when it is excited by the bounty and familiarity of those above them; the warm glow of gratitude enters into their mirth, and a kind word or a small pleasantry frankly uttered by a patron gladdens the heart of the dependant more than oil and wine. When the squire had retired the merriment increased, and there was much joking and laughter, particularly between Master Simon and a hale, ruddy-faced, white-headed farmer who appeared to be the wit of the village; for I observed all his companions to wait with open mouths for his retorts, and burst into a gratuitous laugh before they could well understand them.

The whole house indeed seemed abandoned to merriment: as I passed to my room to dress for dinner, I heard the sound of music in a small court, and, looking through a window that commanded it, I perceived a band of

wandering musicians with pandean pipes and tambourine; a pretty coquettish housemaid was dancing a jig with a smart country lad, while several of the other servants were looking on. In the midst of her sport the girl caught a glimpse of my face at the window, and, coloring up, ran off with a air of roguish affected confusion.

THE CHRISTMAS DINNER.

Lo, now is come our joyful'st feast!
Let every man be jolly.
Eache roome with yvie leaves is drest,
And every post with holly.
Now all our neighbors' chimneys smoke,
And Christmas blocks are burning;
Their ovens they with bak't meats choke
And all their spits are turning.
Without the door let sorrow lie,
And if, for cold, it hap to die,
Wee'l bury 't in a Christmas pye,
And evermore be merry.

Withers, Juvenilia.

I had finished my toilet, and was loitering with Frank Bracebridge in the library, when we heard a distant thwacking sound, which he informed me was a signal for the serving up of the dinner. The squire kept up old customs in kitchen as well as hall, and the rolling-pin, struck upon the dresser by the cook, summoned the servants to carry in the meats.

Just in this nick the cook knock'd thrice,
And all the waiters in a trice
His summons did obey;
Each serving-man, with dish in hand,
March'd boldly up, like our train-band,
Presented and away.*

The dinner was served up in the great hall,

* Sir John Suckling.

where the squire always held his Christmas banquet. A blazing crackling fire of logs had been heaped on to warm the spacious apartment, and the flame went sparkling and wreathing up the wide-mouthed chimney. The great picture of the crusader and his white horse had been profusely decorated with greens for the occasion, and holly and ivy had likewise been wreathed round the helmet and weapons on the opposite wall, which I understood were the arms of the same warrior. I must own, by the by, I had strong doubts about the authenticity of the painting and armor as having belonged to the crusader, they certainly having the stamp of more recent days; but I was told that the painting had been so considered time out of mind; and that as to the armor, it had been found in a lumber-room and elevated to its present situation by the squire, who at once determined it to be the armor of the family hero; and as he was absolute authority on all such subjects in his own household, the matter had passed into current acceptation. A side-board was set out just under this chivalric trophy, on which was a display of plate that might have vied (at least in variety) with Belshazzar's parade of the vessels of the temple: "flagons, cans, cups, beakers, goblets, basins, and ewers," the gorgeous utensils of good companionship that had gradually accumulated through many generations of jovial housekeepers. Before these stood the two Yule candles, beaming like two stars of the first magnitude; other lights

were distributed in branches, and the whole array glittered like a firmament of silver.

We were ushered into this banqueting scene with the sound of minstrelsy, the old harper being seated on a stool beside the fireplace and twanging his instrument with a vast deal more power than melody. Never did Christmas board display a more goodly and gracious assemblage of countenances; those who were not handsome were at least happy, and happiness is a rare improver of your hard-favored visage. I always consider an old English family as well worth studying as a collection of Holbein's portraits or Albert Durer's prints. There is much antiquarian lore to be acquired, much knowledge of the physiognomies of former times. Perhaps it may be from having continually before their eyes those rows of old family portraits, with which the mansions of this country are stocked; certain it is that the quaint features of antiquity are often most faithfully perpetuated in these ancient lines, and I have traced an old family nose through a whole picture-gallery, legitimately handed down from generation to generation almost from the time of the Conquest. Something of the kind was to be observed in the worthy company around me. Many of their faces had evidently originated in a Gothic age, and been merely copied by succeeding generations; and there was one little girl in particular, of staid demeanor, with a high Roman nose and an antique vinegar aspect, who was a great favorite of the squire's, being, as he

said, a Bracebridge all over, and the very counterpart of one of his ancestors who figured in the court of Henry VIII.

The parson said grace, which was not a short familiar one, such as is commonly addressed to the Deity in these unceremonious days, but a long, courtly, well-worded one of the ancient school. There was now a pause, as if something was expected, when suddenly the butler entered the hall with some degree of bustle: he was attended by a servant on each side with a large wax-light, and bore a silver dish on which was an enormous pig's head decorated with rosemary, with a lemon in its mouth, which was placed with great formality at the head of the table. The moment this pageant made its appearance the harper struck up a flourish; at the conclusion of which the young Oxonian, on receiving a hint from the squire, gave, with an air of the most comic gravity, an old carol, the first verse of which was as follows:

Caput apri defero
Reddens laudes Domino.
The boar's head in hand bring I,
With garlands gay and rosemary.
I pray you all synge merrily
Qui estis in convivio.

Though prepared to witness many of these little eccentricities, from being apprised of the peculiar hobby of mine host, yet I confess the parade with which so odd a dish was introduced somewhat perplexed me, until I gathered from the conversation of the squire

and the parson that it was meant to represent the bringing in of the boar's head, a dish formerly served up with much ceremony and the sound of minstrelsy and song at great tables on Christmas Day. "I like the old custom," said the squire, "not merely because it is stately and pleasing in itself, but because it was observed at the college at Oxford at which I was educated. When I hear the old song chanted it brings to mind the time when I was young and gamesome, and the noble old college hall, and my fellow-students loitering about in their black gowns; many of whom, poor lads! are now in their graves."

The parson, however, whose mind was not haunted by such associations, and who was always more taken up with the text than the sentiment, objected to the Oxonian's version of the carol, which he affirmed was different from that sung at college. He went on, with the dry perseverance of a commentator, to give the college reading, accompanied by sundry annotations, addressing himself at first to the company at large; but, finding their attention gradually diverted to other talk and other objects, he lowered his tone as his number of auditors diminished, until he concluded his remarks in an under voice to a fat-headed old gentleman next him who was silently engaged in the discussion of a huge plateful of turkey.*

* The old ceremony of serving up the boar's head on Christmas Day is still observed in the hall of Queen's College, Oxford. I was favored by the parson with a copy of the carol as now sung, and as it may be accept-

The table was literally loaded with good cheer, and presented an epitome of country abundance in this season of overflowing larders. A distinguished post was allotted to "ancient sirloin," as mine host termed it, being, as he added, "the standard of old English hospitality, and a joint of goodly presence, and full of expectation." There were several dishes quaintly decorated, and which had evidently something traditional in their embellishments, but about which, as I did not like to appear over-curious, I asked no questions.

I could not, however, but notice a pie magnificently decorated with peacock's feathers, in imitation of the tail of that bird, which overshadowed a considerable tract of the table. This, the squire confessed with some little hes-

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able to such of my readers as are curious in these grave and learned matters, I give it entire:

The boar's head in hand bear I,
Bedeck'd with bays and rosemary;
And I pray you, my masters, be merry
Quot estis in convivio
Caput apri defero,
Reddens laudes domino.

The boar's head, as I understand,
Is the rarest dish in all this land,
Which thus bedeck'd with a gay garland
Let us servire cantico
Caput apri defero, etc.

Our steward hath provided this
In honor of the King of Bliss,
Which on this day to be served is
In Reginensi Atrio.
Caput apri defero, etc., etc., etc.

itation, was a pheasant pie, though a peacock pie was certainly the most authentical; but there had been such a mortality among the peacocks this season that he could not prevail upon himself to have one killed.*

It would be tedious, perhaps, to my wiser readers, who may not have that foolish fondness for odd and obsolete things to which I am a little given, were I to mention the other makeshifts of this worthy old humorist, by which he was endeavoring to follow up, though at humble distance, the quaint customs of antiquity. I was pleased, however, to see the respect shown to his whims by his children and relatives; who, indeed, entered readily into the full spirit of them, and seemed all well versed in their parts, having doubtless been present

*The peacock was anciently in great demand for stately entertainments. Sometimes it was made into a pie, at one end of which the head appeared above the crust in all its plumage, with the beak richly gilt; at the other end the tail was dispayed. Such pies were served up at the solemn banquets of chivalry, when knights-errant pledged themselves to undertake any perilous enterprise, whence came the ancient oath, used by Justice Shallow, "by cock and pie."

The peacock was also an important dish for the Christmas feast; and Massinger in his "City Madam," gives some idea of the extravagance with which this, as well as other dishes, was prepared for the gorgeous revels of the olden times:

Men may talk of Country Christmasses,
Their thirty pound butter'd eggs, their pies of carps' tongues;
Their pheasants drench'd with ambergris: the carcases of three fat wethers bruised for gravy to make sauce for a single peacock!

at many a rehearsal. I was amused, too, at the air of profound gravity with which the butler and other servants executed the duties assigned them, however eccentric. They had an old-fashioned look, having, for the most part, been brought up in the household and grown into keeping with the antiquated mansion and the humors of its lord, and most probably looked upon all his whimsical regulations as the established laws of honorable housekeeping.

When the cloth was removed the butler brought in a huge silver vessel of rare and curious workmanship, which he placed before the squire. Its appearance was hailed with acclamation, being the Wassail Bowl, so renowned in Christmas festivity. The contents had been prepared by the squire himself; for it was a beverage in the skilful mixture of which he particularly prided himself, alleging that it was too abstruse and complex for the comprehension of an ordinary servant. It was a potation, indeed, that might well make the heart of a toper leap within him, being composed of the richest and raciest wines, highly spiced and sweetened, with roasted apples bobbing about the surface.*

The old gentleman's whole countenance beamed with a serene look of indwelling delight as he stirred this mighty bowl. Having raised

*The Wassail Bowl was sometimes composed of ale instead of wine, with nutmeg, sugar, toast, ginger, and roasted crabs; in this way the nut-brown beverage is still prepared in some old families and round the hearths of substantial farmers at Christmas. It is also

it to his lips, with a hearty wish of a merry Christmas to all present, he sent it brimming round the board, for every one to follow his example, according to the primitive style, pronouncing it "the ancient fountain of good feeling, where all hearts met together."*

There was much laughing and rallying as the honest emblem of Christmas joviality circulated and was kissed rather coyly by the ladies. When it reached Master Simon, he raised it in both hands, and with the air of a boon companion struck up an old Wassail Chanson:

The brown bowle,
The merry brown bowle,
As it goes round-about-a,
Fill
Still,
Let the world say what it will,
And drink your fill all out-a.

The deep canne,
The merry deep canne,
As thou dost freely quaff-a,

---

called Lamb's Wool, and is celebrated by Herrick in his "Twelfth Night:"

Next crowne the bowle full
With gentle Lamb's Wool;
Add sugar, nutmeg, and ginger,
With store of ale too,
And thus ye must doe
To make the Wassaile a swinger.

*"The custom of drinking out of the same cup gave place to each having his cup. When the steward came to the doore with the Wassel, he was to cry three times Wassel, Wassel, Wassel, and then the chappell (chaplain) was to answer with a song."—Archæologia.

Sing
Fling,
Be as merry as a king,
And sound a lusty laugh-a.*

Much of the conversation during dinner turned upon family topics, to which I was a stranger. There was, however, a great deal of rallying of Master Simon about some gay widow with whom he was accused of having a flirtation. This attack was commenced by the ladies, but it was continued throughout the dinner by the flat-headed old gentleman next the parson with the persevering assiduity of a slow hound, being one of those long-winded jokers, who, though rather dull at starting game, are unrivaled for their talents in hunting it down. At every pause in the general conversation he renewed his bantering in pretty much the same terms, winking hard at me with both eyes whenever he gave Master Simon what he considered a home-thrust. The latter, indeed, seemed fond of being teased on the subject, as old bachelors are apt to be, and he took occasion to inform me, in an undertone, that the lady in question was a prodigiously fine woman and drove her own curricle.

The dinner-time passed away in this flow of innocent hilarity, and, though the old hall may have resounded in its time with many a scene of broader rout and revel, yet I doubt whether it ever witnessed more honest and genuine enjoyment. How easy it is for one

*From Poor Robin's Almanack.

benevolent being to diffuse pleasure around him! and how truly is a kind heart a fountain of gladness, making everything in its vicinity to freshen into smiles! The joyous disposition of the worthy squire was perfectly contagious; he was happy himself, and disposed to make all the world happy, and the little eccentricities of his humor did but season, in a manner, the sweetness of his philanthropy.

When the ladies had retired, the conversation, as usual, became still more animated; many good things were broached which had been thought of during dinner, but which would not exactly do for a lady's ear; and, though I cannot positively affirm that there was much wit uttered, yet I have certainly heard many contests of rare wit produce much less laughter. Wit, after all, is a mighty tart, pungent ingredient, and much too acid for some stomachs; but honest good-humor is the oil and wine of a merry meeting, and there is no jovial companionship equal to that where the jokes are rather small and the laughter abundant.

The squire told several long stories of early college pranks and adventures, in some of which the parson had been a sharer, though in looking at the latter it required some effort of imagination to figure such a little dark anatomy of a man into the perpetrator of a madcap gambol. Indeed, the two college chums presented pictures of what men may be made by their different lots in life. The squire had left the university to live lustily on his

paternal domains in the vigorous enjoyment of prosperity and sunshine, and had flourished on to a hearty and florid old age; whilst the poor parson, on the contrary, had dried and withered away among dusty tomes in the silence and shadows of his study. Still, there seemed to be a spark of almost extinguished fire feebly glimmering in the bottom of his soul; and as the squire hinted at a sly story of the parson and a pretty milkmaid whom they once met on the banks of the Isis, the old gentleman made an "alphabet of faces," which, as far as I could decipher his physiognomy, I verily believe was indicative of laughter; indeed, I have rarely met with an old gentleman that took absolute offence at the imputed gallantries of his youth.

I found the tide of wine and wassail fast gaining on the dry land of sober judgment. The company grew merrier and louder as their jokes grew duller. Master Simon was in as chirping a humor as a grasshopper filled with dew; his old songs grew of a warmer complexion, and he began to talk maudlin about the widow. He even gave a long song about the wooing of a widow which he informed me he had gathered from an excellent black-letter work entitled "Cupid's Solicitor for Love," containing store of good advice for bachelors, and which he promised to lend me; the first verse was to this effect:

He that will woo a widow must not dally,
He must make hay while the sun doth shine
He must not stand with her, shall I, shall I,
But boldly say, Widow, thou must be mine.

This song inspired the fat-headed old gentleman, who made several attempts to tell a rather broad story out of Joe Miller that was pat to the purpose; but he always stuck in the middle, everybody recollecting the latter part excepting himself. The parson, too, began to show the effects of good cheer, having gradually settled down into a doze and his wig sitting most suspiciously on one side. Just at this juncture we were summoned to the drawing-room, and I suspect, at the private instigation of mine host, whose joviality seemed always tempered with a proper love of decorum.

After the dinner-table was removed the hall was given up to the younger members of the family, who, prompted to all kind of noisy mirth by the Oxonian and Master Simon, made its old walls ring with their merriment as they played at romping games. I delight in witnessing the gambols of children, and particularly at this happy holiday season, and could not help stealing out of the drawing-room one hearing one of their peals of laughter. I found them at the game of blindman's-buff. Master Simon, who was the leader of their revels, and seemed on all occasions to fulfill the office of that ancient potentate, the Lord of Misrule,* was blinded in the midst of the hall. The little beings were as busy about

*At Christmasse there was in the Kinges house, wheresoever hee was lodged, a lorde of misrule or mayster of merie disportes, and the like had ye in the house of every nobleman of honor, or good worshippe, were he spirituall or temporall.—Stow.

him as the mock fairies about Falstaff, pinching him, plucking at the skirts of his coat, and tickling him with straws. One fine blue-eyed girl of about thirteen, with her flaxen hair all in beautiful confusion, her frolic face in a glow, her frock half torn off her shoulders, a complete picture of a romp, was the chief tormentor; and, from the slyness with which Master Simon avoided the smaller game and hemmed this wild little nymph in corners, and obliged her to jump shrieking over chairs, I suspected the rogue of being not a whit more blinded than was convenient.

When I returned to the drawing-room I found the company seated round the fire listening to the parson, who was deeply ensconced in a high-backed oaken chair, the work of some cunning artificer of yore, which had been brought from the library for his particular accommodation. From this venerable piece of furniture, with which his shadowy figure and dark weazen face so admirably accorded, he was dealing out strange accounts of the popular superstitions and legends of the surrounding country, with which he had become acquainted in the course of his antiquarian researches. I am half inclined to think that the old gentleman was himself somewhat tinctured with superstition, as men are very apt to be who live a recluse and studious life in a sequestered part of the country and pore over black-letter tracts, so often filled with the marvelous and supernatural. He gave us several anecdotes of the fancies of the

neighboring peasantry concerning the effigy of the crusader which lay on the tomb by the church altar. As it was the only monument of the kind in that part of the country, it had always been regarded with feelings of superstition by the good wives of the village. It was said to get up from the tomb and walk the rounds of the churchyard in stormy nights, particularly when it thundered; and one old woman, whose cottage bordered on the churchyard, had seen it through the windows of the church, when the moon shone, slowly pacing up and down the aisles. It was the belief that some wrong had been left unredressed by the deceased, or some treasure hidden, which kept the spirit in a state of trouble and restlessness. Some talked of gold and jewels buried in the tomb, over which the spectre kept watch; and there was a story current of a sexton in old times who endeavored to break his way to the coffin at night, but just as he reached it received a violent blow from the marble hand of the effigy, which stretched him senseless on the pavement. These tales were often laughed at by some of the sturdier among the rustics, yet when night came on there were many of the stoutest unbelievers that were shy of venturing alone in the footpath that led across the churchyard.

From these and other anecdotes that followed the crusader appeared to be the favorite hero of ghost-stories throughout the vicinity. His picture, which hung up in the hall, was thought by the servants to have something supernatural

about it; for they remarked that in whatever part of the hall you went the eyes of the warrior were still fixed on you. The old porter's wife, too, at the lodge, who had been born and brought up in the family, and was a great gossip among the maid-servants, affirmed that in her young days she had often heard say that on Midsummer Eve, when it was well known all kinds of ghosts, goblins, and fairies become visible and walk aboard, the crusader used to mount his horse, come down from his picture, ride about the house, down the avenue, and so to the church to visit the tomb; on which occasion the church-door most civilly swung open of itself; not that he needed it, for he rode through closed gates, and even stone walls, and had been seen by one of the dairymaids to pass between two bars of the great park gate, making himself as thin as a sheet of paper.

All these superstitions I found had been very much countenanced by the squire, who, though not superstitious himself, was very fond of seeing others so. He listened to every goblin tale of the neighboring gossips with infinite gravity, and held the porter's wife in high favor on account of her talent for the marvelous. He was himself a great reader of old legends and romances, and often lamented that he could not believe in them; for a superstitious person, he thought, must live in a kind of fairy-land.

Whilst we were all attention to the parson's stories, our ears were suddenly assailed by a burst of heterogeneous sounds from the hall, in which were mingled something like the clang

of rude minstrelsy with the uproar of many small voices and girlish laughter. The door suddenly flew open, and a train came trooping into the room that might almost have been mistaken for the breaking up of the court of Faery. That indefatigable spirit, Master Simon, in the faithful discharge of his duties as lord of misrule, had conceived the idea of a Christmas mummery or masking; and having called in to his assistance the Oxonian and the young officer, who were equally ripe for anything that should occasion romping and merriment, they had carried it into instant effect. The old house-keeper had been consulted; the antique clothes-presses and wardrobes rummaged and made to yield up the relics of finery that had not seen the light for several generations; the younger part of the company had been privately convened from the parlor and hall, and the whole had been bedizened out into a burlesque imitation of an antique mask.*

Master Simon led the van, as "Ancient Christmas," quaintly appareled in a ruff, a short cloak, which had very much the aspect of one of the old housekeeper's petticoats, and a hat that might have served for a village steeple, and must indubitably have figured in the days of the Covenanters. From under

*Maskings or mummeries were favorite sports at Christmas in old times, and the wardrobes at halls and manor-houses were often laid under contribution to furnish dresses and fantastic disguisings. I strongly suspect Master Simon to have taken the idea of his from Ben Jonson's "Masque of Christmas."

this his nose curved boldly forth, flushed with a frost-bitten bloom that seemed the very trophy of a December blast. He was accompanied by the blue-eyed romp, dished up, as "Dame Mince Pie," in the venerable magnificence of a faded brocade, long stomacher, peaked hat, and high-heeled shoes. The young officer appeared as Robin Hood, in a sporting dress of Kendal green and a foraging cap with a gold tassel.

The costume, to be sure, did not bear testimony to deep research, and there was an evident eye to the picturesque, natural to a young gallant in the presence of his mistress. The fair Julia hung on his arm in a pretty rustic dress as "Maid Marian." The rest of the train had been metamorphosed in various ways; the girls trussed up in the finery of the ancient belles of the Bracebridge line, and the striplings bewhiskered with burnt cork, and gravely clad in broad skirts, hanging sleeves, and full-bottomed wigs, to represent the character of Roast Beef, Plum Pudding, and other worthies celebrated in ancient maskings. The whole was under the control of the Oxonian in the appropriate character of Misrule; and I observed that he exercised rather a mischievous sway with his wand over the smaller personages of the pageant.

The irruption of this motley crew with beat of drum, according to ancient custom, was the consummation of uproar and merriment. Master Simon covered himself with glory by the stateliness with which, as Ancient Christ-

mas, he walked a minuet with the peerless though giggling Dame Mince Pie. It was followed by a dance of all the characters, which from its medley of costumes seemed as though the old family portraits had skipped down from their frames to join in the sport. Different centuries were figuring at cross hands and right and left; the Dark Ages were cutting pirouettes and rigadoons; and the days of Queen Bess jigging merrily down the middle through a line of succeeding generations.

The worthy squire contemplated these fantastic sports and this resurrection of his old wardrobe with the simple relish of childish delight. He stood chuckling and rubbing his hands, and scarcely hearing a word the parson said, notwithstanding that the latter was discoursing most authentically on the ancient and stately dance of the Pavon, or peacock, from which he conceived the minuet to be derived.* For my part, I was in a continual excitement from the varied scenes of whim and innocent gayety passing before me. It was inspiring to see wild-eyed frolic and warm-hearted hospitality breaking out from among the chills and glooms of winter, and old age throwing off his apathy and catching once

* Sir John Hawkins, speaking of the dance called the Pavon, from "pavo," a peacock, says, "It is a grave and majestic dance; the method of dancing it anciently was by gentlemen dressed with caps and swords, by those of the long robe in their gowns, by the peers in their mantles, and by the ladies in gowns with long trains, the motion whereof, in dancing, resembled that of a peacock."—History of Music.

more the freshness of youthful enjoyment. I felt also an interest in the scene from the consideration that these fleeting customs were posting fast into oblivion, and that this was perhaps the only family in England in which the whole of them was still punctiliously observed. There was a quaintness, too, mingled with all this revelry that gave it a peculiar zest: it was suited to the time and place; and as the old manor-house almost reeled with mirth and wassail, it seemed echoing back the joviality of long departed years.*

But enough of Christmas and its gambols; it is time for me to pause in this garrulity. Methinks I hear the questions asked by my graver readers, "To what purpose is all this? how is the world to be made wiser by this talk?" Alas! is there not wisdom enough extant for the instruction of the world? And if not, are there not thousands of abler pens laboring for its improvement? It is so much pleasanter to please than to instruct—to play the companion rather than the preceptor.

What, after all, is the mite of wisdom that I could throw into the mass of knowledge? or how am I sure that my sagest deductions may

* At the time of the first publication of this paper the picture of an old-fashioned Christmas in the country was pronounced by some as out of date. The author had afterwards an opportunity of witnessing almost all the customs above described, existing in unexpected vigor in the skirts of Derbyshire and Yorkshire, where he passed the Christmas holidays. The reader will find some notice of them in the author's account of his sojourn at Newstead Abbey.

be safe guides for the opinions of others? But in writing to amuse, if I fail the only evil is in my own disappointment. If, however, I can by any lucky chance, in these days of evil, rub out one wrinkle from the brow of care or beguile the heavy heart of one moment of sorrow; if I can now and then penetrate through the gathering film of misanthropy, prompt a benevolent view of human nature, and make my reader more in good-humor with his fellow-beings and himself—surely, surely, I shall not then have written entirely in vain.

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